



# Lille, Flanders & the Somme

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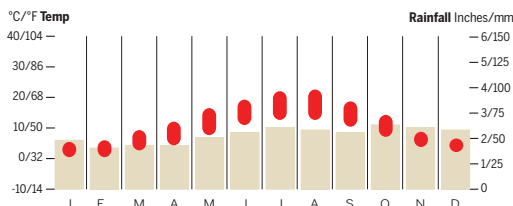
## Why Go?

True, a tan is easier to come by along the Mediterranean, but when it comes to culture, cuisine, beer, shopping and dramatic views of land and sea – not to mention good old-fashioned friendliness – the Ch'tis (residents of France's northern tip) and their region compete with the best France has to offer. In Lille and French Flanders, the down-to-earth Flemish vibe mixes easily with French sophistication and savoir faire. And in the Somme, although WWI has been over for almost a century, the British, Canadians and Australians who perished in the trenches of the Western Front have not been forgotten. The moving memorials and cemeteries marking the front lines of 1916 remain places of pilgrimage and reflection.

If you snag a promotional fare on the Eurostar, Lille, Flanders and the Somme make for a superb short trip from London – with a much smaller carbon footprint than flying.

## When to Go

### Lille



**February and March** Pre-Lenten carnivals bring out marching bands and costumed revellers.

**1 July** Remembrance ceremonies at Thiepval on the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme.

**September (1st weekend)** The world's largest flea market, the Braderie, takes over Lille.



## Lille, Flanders & the Somme Highlights

- 1 Stroll around Lille's chic **old city** (p155) and sample the city's world-renowned **museums** (p157) and first-rate **restaurants** (p160)
- 2 Marvel at Amiens' breathtaking **Gothic cathedral** (p175) both inside and out
- 3 Ramble along the spectacular, windswept **Côte d'Opale** (p168), facing the white cliffs of Dover

- 4 Ponder the sacrifices and horror of WWI in **Vimy** (p187)
- 5 Reflect on a New York regiment's fallen at the **Somme American Cemetery** (p185)
- 6 Stroll around – and under – the **Flemish-style centre** (p178) of Arras

- 7 Watch clacking, Victorian-era machinery turn thread into lace at the new **Cité Internationale de la Dentelle et de la Mode** (p165) in Calais
- 8 Commune with sea creatures at **Nausicaä** (p169) in Boulogne-sur-Mer

## History & Geography

In the Middle Ages, the Nord *département* (the sliver of France along the Belgian border; [www.cdt-nord.fr](http://www.cdt-nord.fr)), together with much of Belgium and part of the Netherlands, belonged to a feudal principality known as Flanders (Flandre or Flandres in French, Vlaanderen in Flemish), which has absolutely nothing to do with Homer Simpson's sanctimonious next-door neighbour Ned and everything to do with John McCrae's famous WWI poem 'In Flanders Fields'. Today, many people in the area still speak Flemish – essentially Dutch with some variation in pronunciation and vocabulary – and are very proud of their *flamand* culture and cuisine. Along with the neighbouring *département* of Pas-de-Calais ([www.pas-de-calais.com](http://www.pas-de-calais.com)), which runs inland from the Pas de Calais (Strait of Dover), the Nord forms the *région* of Nord-Pas de Calais ([www.tourisme-nordpasdecals.fr](http://www.tourisme-nordpasdecals.fr)).

The area south of the Somme estuary and Albert forms the *région* of Picardy (Picardie; [www.cr-picardie.fr](http://www.cr-picardie.fr)), historically centred on the Somme *département* ([www.somme-tourisme.com](http://www.somme-tourisme.com)), which saw some of the bloodiest fighting of WWI. The popular British WWI love song 'Roses of Picardy' ([www.firstworldwar.com/audio/rosesofpicardy.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/audio/rosesofpicardy.htm)) was penned here in 1916 by Frederick E Weatherley.

### Getting There & Away

Lille, Flanders and the Somme are a hop, skip and a jump from southwest England. By train on the **Eurostar** ([www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com); p973) pricey unless you've got a promotional fare (London–Lille starts at just UK£55 return) – Lille is just 70 minutes from London's St Pancras International train station. **Eurotunnel** ([www.eurotunnel.com](http://www.eurotunnel.com)) can get you and your car from Folkestone to Calais, via the Channel Tunnel, in a mere 35 minutes (p972). For those with sturdy sea legs, car ferries (p973) link Dover with Calais, Callogne-sur-Mer and Dunkirk. At present, the only sailings open to foot pas-

sengers are those run by P&O Ferries, during daylight hours, between Dover and Calais.

On the Continent, superfast Eurostar and TGV trains link Lille with Brussels (35 minutes), and TGVs make travel from Lille to Paris' Gare du Nord (one hour) and Charles de Gaulle Airport (one hour) a breeze. Compiègne is close enough to Paris to be visited on a day trip.

## Lille

POP 232,000

Lille (Rijsel in Flemish) may be France's most underrated major city. In recent decades this once-grimy industrial metropolis, its economy based on declining industries, has transformed itself – with generous government help – into a glittering and self-confident cultural and commercial hub. Highlights for the visitor include an attractive old town with a strong Flemish accent, three renowned art museums, stylish shopping, some excellent dining options and a cutting-edge, student-driven nightlife scene. The Lillois have a well-deserved reputation for friendliness – and are so proud of being friendly that they often mention it!

Thanks to the Eurostar and the TGV, Lille makes an easy, environmentally sustainable weekend destination from London, Paris or Brussels.

## History


Lille owes its name – once spelled L'Isle – to the fact that it was founded, back in the 11th century, on an island in the River Deûle. In 1667 the city was captured by French forces led personally by Louis XIV, who promptly set about fortifying his prize, creating the Lille Citadel. In the 1850s the miserable conditions in which Lille's 'labouring classes' lived – the city was long the centre of France's textile industry – were exposed by Victor Hugo.

Lille has shown renewed vigour and self-confidence since the TGV came to town in 1993, followed a year later by the Eurostar from London.

## Sights & Activities

### Exploring the City Centre

WALKING TOUR

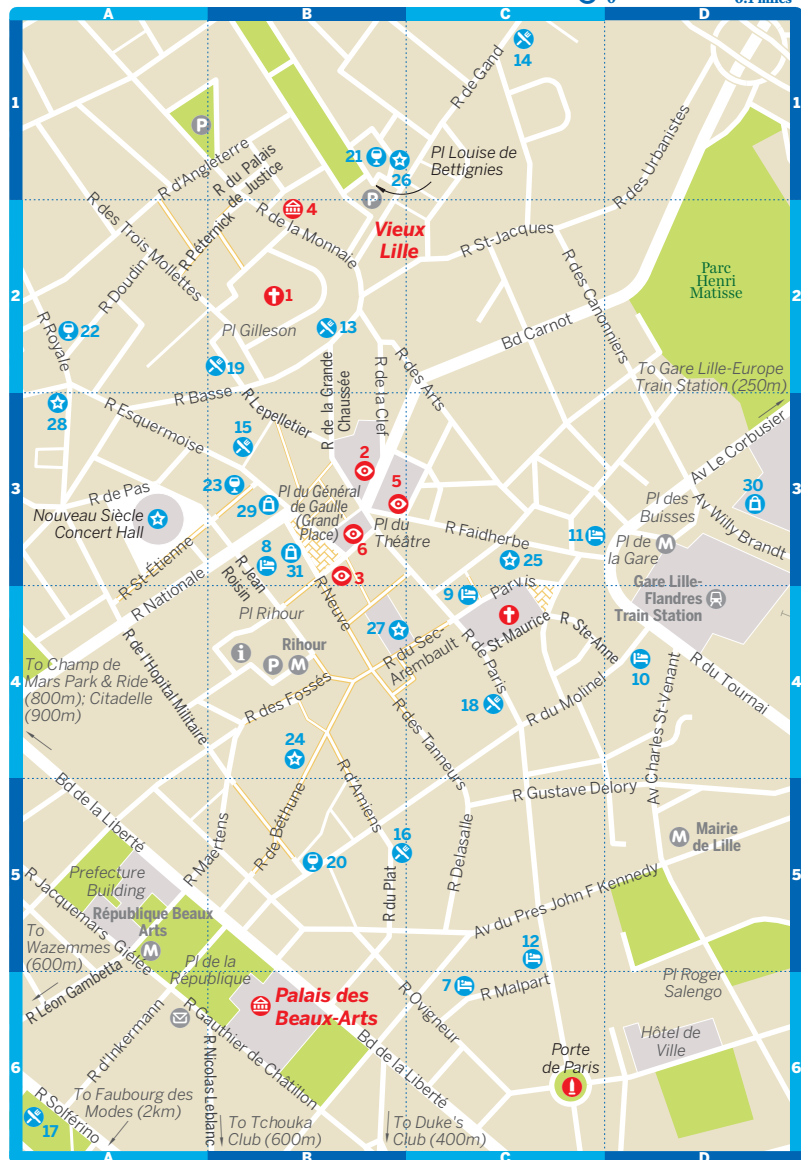
The best place to begin a discovery stroll through the Flemish heart of the city centre is the **Vieille Bourse** (Old Stock Exchange; place du Général de Gaulle;  Rihour), a Flemish Renaissance extravaganza ornately decorated with caryatids and cornucopia. Built in 1653, it consists of 24 separate houses

### NORTHERNERS' REVENGE

In 2008 the film *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* (Welcome to the Sticks; see p920), which debunks grim stereotypes about French Flanders with high jinks and hilarity, swept France, becoming the biggest box office hit in the history of French cinema and creating a miniboom in domestic tourism.

Just west of the Vieille Bourse is **place du Général de Gaulle**, where you can admire the 1932 art deco home of **La Voix du Nord** (the leading regional newspaper), crowned by a gilded sculpture of the Three Graces. The goddess-topped **victory column** (1845) in the fountain commemorates

0 200 m  
0 0.1 miles



the city's successful resistance to the Austrian siege of 1792. On long, warm evenings in the spring and summer, Lillois come here by the thousands to stroll, take in the atmosphere and – somewhere nearby – stop for a strong local beer (p162).

Just east of the Vieille Bourse, impressive **place du Théâtre** is dominated by the

Louis XVI-style **Opéra**, its steps a favourite hang-out for young Lillois, and the neo-Flemish **Chambre de Commerce**, topped by a 76m-high spire that sports a gilded clock. Both were built in the early 20th century. Look east along **rue Faidherbe** and you can see Gare Lille-Flandres way at the other end.

**Vieux Lille** (Old Lille), justly proud of its restored 17th- and 18th-century brick houses, begins just north of here. Hard to believe, but in the late 1970s this quarter was a half-abandoned slum dominated by empty, dilapidated buildings, their windows breeze-blocked-up to keep out vandals and squatters. Head north along **rue de la Grande Chaussée**, lined with Lille's chic-est shops, and take a peek at **À l'Huîtrière** restaurant, an art deco masterpiece. Continue north along **rue de la Monnaie** (named after a mint constructed here in 1685), whose old brick residences now house boutiques and the Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse.

Turning left (west) on tiny **rue Péter-inck** and then left again will take you to the 19th-century, neo-Gothic **Cathédrale Notre-Dame-de-la-Treille** (☉10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm or 6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm or 7pm Sun), which has a strikingly modern (some would say 'jarring') west facade (1999) that looks better from inside the nave, where you can admire some decent 19th-century stained glass and mosaics.

### Palais des Beaux-Arts

ART MUSEUM

(www.pba-lille.fr; place de la République; adult €5.50; ☉2-6pm Mon, 10am-6pm Wed-Sun; M République Beaux Arts) Lille's world-renowned Fine Arts Museum displays a truly first-rate collection of 15th- to 20th-century paintings, including works by Rubens, Van Dyck and Manet. Exquisite porcelain and faience (pottery), much of it of local provenance, is on the ground floor, while in the basement you'll find classical archaeology, medieval statuary and 18th-century scale models of the fortified cities of northern France and Belgium. Tickets are valid for the whole day. Information sheets in French, English and Dutch are available in each hall.

### Musée d'Art Moderne Lille-Métropole

ART MUSEUM

(☎03 20 19 68 68; www.musee-lam.fr; 1 allée du Musée, Villeneuve-d'Ascq; adult €7, incl temporary exhibits €10; ☉10am-6pm, closed Mon) Colourful, playful and just plain weird works of modern and contemporary art by masters such as Braque, Calder, Léger,

## Lille

### Top Sights

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Vieux Lille.....	B2

### Sights

1 Cathédrale Notre-Dame-de-la-Treille .....	B2
2 Chambre de Commerce .....	B3
3 La Voix du Nord .....	B3
4 Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse.....	B2
5 Opéra .....	B3
6 Vieille Bourse .....	B3

### Sleeping

7 Auberge de Jeunesse.....	C6
8 Grand Hôtel Bellevue .....	B3
9 Hôtel Brueghel .....	C4
10 Hôtel du Moulin d'Or .....	D4
11 Hôtel Flandre-Angleterre.....	C3
12 L'Hermitage Gantois .....	C5

### Eating

13 À l'Huîtrière .....	B2
Carrefour Hypermarket .....	(see 30)
14 Chez la Vieille .....	C1
15 Fromagerie Philippe Olivier .....	B3
16 La Source .....	B5
17 Marché Sébastopol .....	A6
18 Monoprix Supermarket.....	C4
19 Tous Les Jours Dimanche .....	B2

### Drinking

20 Café Citoyen .....	B5
21 Café Oz .....	B1
22 L'Illustration Café .....	A2
23 Meert .....	B3

### Entertainment

24 Cinéma Majestic .....	B4
25 Cinéma Métropole.....	C3
26 Coming Out .....	B1
27 Fnac Billetterie.....	B4
28 Vice Versa .....	A3

### Shopping

29 Alice Délice.....	B3
30 Euralille Shopping Mall.....	D3
31 Le Furet du Nord.....	B3

Miró, Modigliani and Picasso are the big draw at the renowned Museum of Modern Art, reopened in late 2010 after extensive renovations. A brand new wing features Art Brut (outsider art). Situated in the Lille suburb of Villeneuve-d'Ascq, in a sculpture park 9km east of Gare Lille-Europe. To get there, take metro line 1 to Pont de Bois and then bus 41 to Parc Urbain-Musée.

### La Piscine Musée d'Art et d'Industrie


ART MUSEUM

(www.roubaix-lapiscine.com; 23 rue de l'Espérance, Roubaix;  Gare Jean Lebas; adult €4.50;  11am-6pm Tue-Thu, 11am-8pm Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun) If Paris can turn a disused train station into a world-class museum (the Musée d'Orsay), why not take an art deco municipal swimming pool (built 1927-32) – an architectural masterpiece inspired by a combination of civic pride and hygienic high-mindedness – and transform it into a temple of the arts? This innovative museum, 12km northeast of Gare Lille-Europe, showcases fine arts, applied arts and sculpture in a delightfully watery environment.

### Wazemmes

NEIGHBOURHOOD

( Gambetta) For an authentic taste of grass-roots Lille, head to the ethnically mixed, family-friendly *quartier populaire* (working-class quarter) of Wazemmes, 1.7km southwest of place du Général de Gaulle, where African immigrants and old-time proletarians live harmoniously alongside penurious students and trendy *bobos* (bourgeois bohemians).


The neighbourhood's focal point is the cavernous **Marché de Wazemmes**, Lille's favourite food market. The adjacent **out-door market** (place de la Nouvelle Aventure;  7am-1.30pm or 2pm Tue, Thu & Sun) is the place to be on Sunday morning – it's a real

carnival scene! **Rue des Sarrazins** and **rue Jules Guesde** are lined with shops, restaurants and Tunisian pastry places, many owned by, and catering to, the area's North African residents; they intersect in the southeastern corner of **place de la Nouvelle Aventure**, whose periphery is sprinkled with cafés.

Wazemmes is famed for its many outdoor concerts and street festivals, including **La Louche d'Or** (Golden Ladle; 1 May), a soup festival that has spread to cities across Europe.


### Maison Natale de Charles de Gaulle

HOUSE MUSEUM

(www.maison-natale-de-gaulle.com; 9 rue Princesse; adult incl audioguide €6;  10am-1pm & 2-6pm Wed-Sat, 1.30-5.30pm Sun, last admission 1hr earlier) The upper-middle-class house in which Charles André Marie Joseph de Gaulle – WWII Resistance leader, architect of the Fifth Republic and ferocious defender of French interests – was born in 1890 is now a museum presenting the French leader in the context of his times, with an emphasis on his connection to French Flanders. Displays include de Gaulle's dainty baptismal robe and some evocative newsreels. The museum is 700m northwest of Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse along rue de la Monnaie and its northward continuation.

### Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse

ART MUSEUM

(32 rue de la Monnaie; adult €3.50;  10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm, closed Mon morning & Tue) Housed in a remarkably attractive 15th- and 17th-century poorhouse, the Hospice Comtesse Museum features ceramics, earthenware wall tiles, religious art and 17th- and 18th-century paintings and furniture. A rood screen separates the Salle des Malades (Hospital Hall) from a mid-17th century chapel (look up to see a mid-19th century painted ceiling).

### Citadelle

FORTRESS

The greatest military architect of the 17th century, Sébastien le Prestre de Vauban (p94), designed this massive fortress, shaped like a five-pointed star, after the capture of Lille by France in 1667. Made of some 60 million bricks, it still functions as a French and NATO military base (for tour details see p159). It stands at the northeastern end of bd de la Liberté. Outside the 2.2km-long outer ramparts is the city centre's largest park.



### LILLE CITY PASS

Available in one-/two-/three-day versions (€20/30/45), the **Lille Métropole** pass gets you into almost all the museums in greater Lille (www.destination-lille-metropole.eu) and affords unlimited use of public transport. The three-day version throws in sites in six cities in the Nord-Pas de Calais *région* and free use of regional TER trains. Available at the Lille tour-ist office.



## BRADERIE DE LILLE

On the first weekend in September Lille's entire city centre – 200km of footpaths – is transformed into the Braderie de Lille, billed as the world's largest **flea market**. The extravaganza – with stands selling antiques, local delicacies, handicrafts and more – dates from the Middle Ages, when Lillois servants were permitted to hawk their employers' old garments for some extra cash.

The city's biggest annual event, the Braderie runs nonstop – yes, all night long – from 2pm on Saturday to 11pm on Sunday, when street sweepers emerge to tackle the mounds of mussel shells and old *frites* (French fries) left behind by the merrymakers. Before the festivities you can make room for all those extra calories by joining in the **semi-marathon** ([www.semimarathon-lille.fr](http://www.semimarathon-lille.fr), in French) that begins at 9am on Saturday, or a 10km run at 11am; both set off from place de la République. Lille's tourist office can supply you with a free map of the festivities.

Children will love the **amusement park, playground** and small **municipal zoo** (admission free; ☀10am–6pm, closed mid-Dec–mid-Feb), all on the Citadelle's southeastern flank. Served by the Citadine shuttle bus.



### Tours

The **tourist office** (☎08 91 56 20 04; [www.lil.letourism.com](http://www.lil.letourism.com); place Rihour; ☀9.30am–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–noon & 2–5pm Sun & holidays; 🕒Rihour) runs various guided tours.

#### Citadelle

GUIDED TOUR

(adult €7; ☀3pm & 4pm Thu–Sun) This is the only way to see the inside of the Citadelle, usually a closed military zone. Sign up for the tour (in French) at least 24 hours ahead and bring a passport or national ID card.

#### Vieux Lille

GUIDED TOUR

(adult €7; ☀in English 10.15am Sat) Departs from the tourist office.

#### Battle of the Somme sites

GUIDED TOUR

(half-day per person €44) Tailor-made itineraries with a private guide.



### Festivals & Events

The **Braderie**, a flea market extraordinaire, is held on the first weekend in September. Christmas decorations and edible goodies are sold at the **Marché de Noël** (Christmas market; place Rihour; ☀late Nov–30 Dec). The varied art exhibitions associated with **Lille 3000** ([www.lille3000.com](http://www.lille3000.com)) 'explore the richness and complexities of the world of tomorrow'.



### Sleeping

Many Lille hotels are at their fullest, and priciest, from Monday to Thursday. Several hotels face Gare Lille-Flandres.



#### L'Hermitage Gantois

DESIGN HOTEL €€€

(☎03 20 85 30 30; [www.hotelhermitagegantois.com](http://www.hotelhermitagegantois.com); 224 rue de Paris; d €215–325, ste €455; 📞📧🕒Mairie de Lille) This luxury hotel creates enchanting, harmonious spaces by complementing its rich architectural heritage – such as a Flemish-Gothic facade – with refined ultramodernism. We love the highly civilised atrium, and the 67 rooms are huge and sumptuous, with Starck accessories next to Louis XV-style chairs and bathrooms that sparkle with Carrara marble. One of the four courtyards is home to a 220-year-old wisteria that's been declared a historic monument. The still-consecrated chapel was built in 1637.

#### Grand Hôtel Bellevue

HISTORIC HOTEL €€

(☎03 20 57 45 64; [www.grandhotelbellevue.com](http://www.grandhotelbellevue.com); 5 rue Jean Roisin; d €145–175; 📞📧🕒M Rihour) Grandly built in the early 20th century, this Best Western-affiliated establishment has a charmingly creaky belle époque lift that trundles guests up to 60 spacious rooms equipped with marble bathrooms, gilded picture frames and flat-screen TVs. Rooms with views of place du Général de Gaulle start at €160. In 1765 the young Mozart stayed on this site (in an earlier building).

#### Hôtel Brueghel

HOTEL €€

(☎03 20 06 06 69; [www.hotel-brueghel.com](http://www.hotel-brueghel.com); 5 parvis St-Maurice; d Mon–Thu €89, Fri–Sun €79; 📞📧🕒M Gare Lille-Flandres) The 65 rooms here mix vaguely antique furnishings with modern styling (eg the bathrooms), though they don't have nearly as much Flemish charm as the lobby. The tiny wood-and-wrought-iron lift and its shiny brass buttons date from the 1930s. Some south-facing rooms have sunny views of the adjacent church.

## Hôtel du Moulin d'Or

HOTEL €€

(☎03 20 06 12 67; [www.hotelmoulindor.com](http://www.hotelmoulindor.com), in French; 15 rue du Molinel; d/tr Mon-Thu €87/98, Fri-Sun €61/71; ☎; ☎; ☎ Gare Lille-Flandres) Rich yellow and blue tones welcome you warmly to this family-run establishment. The 14 rooms – some flowery, others striped – come with bright colours, soundproofing and showers separate from the toilets. The cute little breakfast room feels like a B&B. No lift.

## Hôtel Flandre-Angleterre

HOTEL €€

(☎03 20 06 04 12; [www.hotel-flandreangleterre-lille.com](http://www.hotel-flandreangleterre-lille.com); 13 place de la Gare; s/d Mon-Thu from €66/80, Fri-Sun from €60/69, q €95; ☎; ☎ Gare Lille-Flandres) Forty-four comfortable, clean and quiet rooms, many with red or blue carpeting, await at this practical establishment. The best rooms have views of the bustling Lille-Flanders train station. Lift-equipped.

## Auberge de Jeunesse

HOSTEL €

(☎03 20 57 08 94; [www.hihostels.com](http://www.hihostels.com); 12 rue Malpart; dm incl breakfast €18, d €37; ☎ closed 23 Dec-late Jan; ☎; ☎ Mairie de Lille) This central but Spartan former maternity hospital has 163 beds in rooms for two to eight, kitchen facilities and free car and bicycle parking. Toilets and showers are down the hall for most rooms; a few doubles have en-suite showers. The building is locked from 11am to 3pm (until 4pm from Friday to Sunday).



## Eating

Lille (especially Vieux Lille) has a flourishing culinary scene, with great new places opening up all the time. Keep an eye out for *estaminets* (traditional Flemish eateries, with antique knick-knacks on the walls and plain wooden tables) serving Flemish specialties such as *carbonade* (braised beef stewed with Flemish beer, spice bread and brown sugar) and *potjevleesch* (jellied chicken, pork, veal and rabbit).

Dining hot spots in Vieux Lille include: **rue de Gand** (northeast of Café Oz) – home to a dozen small, moderately-priced French and Flemish restaurants; **rue de la Monnaie** and its side streets (around Musée de l'Hospice Comtesse) – a good place to look for quirky, moderately priced restaurants; and **rue Royale** (just northwest of L'illustration Café) – the place to come for ethnic cuisine (couscous, Japanese etc).

There are heaps of cheap eats along lively, student-dominated **rue Solférino** and **rue Masséna**, about 600m west of the Palais des Beaux-Arts. Good-value *restaurants populaires* can be found in Wazemmes.

## Chez la Vieille

ESTAMINET €

(☎03 28 36 40 06; 60 rue de Gand; mains €9.50-12; ☎ closed Sun & Mon) One of the best places in Lille to tuck into Flemish specialties. Old-time prints, antiques and fresh hops hanging from the rafters create the ambi-

## THE GIANTS

In far northern France and nearby Belgium, *géants* (giants) – wickerwork body masks up to 8.5m tall animated by someone (or several someones) inside – emerge for local carnivals and on feast days to dance and add to the general merriment. Each has a name and a personality, usually based on the Bible, legends or local history. Giants are born, baptised, grow up, marry and have children, creating, over the years, complicated family relationships. They serve as important symbols of town, neighbourhood and village identity. For snapshots check out [http://utan.lille.free.fr/geants\\_1.htm](http://utan.lille.free.fr/geants_1.htm).

Medieval in origin – and also found in places such as the UK ([www.giants.org.uk](http://www.giants.org.uk)), Catalonia, the Austrian Tyrol, Mexico, Brazil and India – giants have been a tradition in northern France since the 16th century. More than 300 of the creatures, also known as *reuze* (in Flemish) and *gayants* (in Picard), now 'live' in French towns, including Arras, Boulogne, Calais, Cassel, Dunkirk and Lille. Local associations cater to their every need, while transnational groups such as the **International Circle of Friends of the Giant Puppets** ([www.ciag.org](http://www.ciag.org)) promote the creatures worldwide. France and Belgium's giants were recognised by Unesco as 'masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity' in 2005.

Giants make appearances year-round but your best chance to see them is at pre-Lenten carnivals, during Easter and at festivals held from May to September, often on weekends. Dates and places – as well as the latest marriage and birth announcements – appear in the free, annual, French-language brochure *Le Calendrier des Géants*, available at tourist offices and online at [www.geants-carnaval.org](http://www.geants-carnaval.org), in French.



ence of a Flemish village circa 1900. The vibe is informal but it's a good idea to call ahead.

### À l'Huitrière

SEAFOOD €€

(☎03 20 55 43 41; [www.huitriere.fr](http://www.huitriere.fr), in French; 3 rue des Chats Bossus; Mon-Sat lunch menus €45, other menus €120; ☺closed dinner Sun & late Jul-late Aug) In 1928 the great-grandfather of the present owners turned to the nascent art deco movement – first exhibited (and named) in Paris just three years earlier – to find suitably elegant decoration for his fish shop on 'Street of the Hunchback Cats'. The sea-themed mosaics and stained glass are worth a look-in even if you're not in the mood to dine on super-fresh seafood – accompanied, perhaps, by a wine or two from the 40,000-bottle cellar. Book ahead for Friday dinner and Saturday.

### La Source

ORGANIC, VEGETARIAN €

(☎03 20 57 53 07; [www.denislasource.com](http://www.denislasource.com), in French; 13 rue du Plat; menus €9.50-16; ☺11.30am-2pm Mon-Sat, 7-9pm Fri; ☎; MRépublique Beaux Arts) This Lille institution, founded way back in 1979, serves delicious vegetarian, fowl and fish *plats du jour*, each accompanied by five hot veggie side dishes. The light, airy ambience and the diners exude health, well-being and cheer.

### Tous Les Jours Dimanche

CAFÉ €

(☎03 28 36 05 92; 13 rue Masurel; menus €13.50-16; ☺restaurant noon-2.30pm, salon de thé 2.30-6.30pm, closed Mon, also closed Sun May-Sep) Having tea or a light lunch here, surrounded by a motley assemblage of antique furniture and well-chosen objets d'art, is like hanging out in an arty friend's living room. Specialities include salads, sandwiches (€10) and quiche-like *tartes* (€10). On Sunday from October to April, you can have a *brunch anglais* (English brunch; €21) starting at 11.30am.

### Self-Catering



#### Marché de Wazemmes

FOOD MARKET €

(place de la Nouvelle Aventure; ☺8am-2pm Tue-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat, 8am-3pm Sun & holidays; M Gambetta) Lille's most beloved foodie space, situated 1.7km southwest of the tourist office in Wazemmes.

#### Marché Sébastopol

FOOD MARKET €

(place Sébastopol; ☺7am-2pm Wed & Sat; MRépublique Beaux Arts)

#### Fromagerie Philippe Olivier

CHEESE SHOP €

(3 rue du Curé St-Étienne; ☺9.30am-7.15pm Tue-Sat, 2.30-7.15pm Mon; M Rihour)

### Monoprix

SUPERMARKET €

(112 rue de Paris; ☺9am-10pm) Picnic supplies in the city centre.

### Carrefour

SUPERMARKET €

(Euraille shopping mall; ☺9am-10pm Mon-Sat; M Gare Lille-Europe) Vast, with no fewer than 62 checkout counters! Stocks more than two dozen different beers brewed right here in French Flanders.



### Drinking

Lille has several drinking and nightlife areas. In **Vieux Lille** the small, stylish bars and cafés along streets such as rue Royale, rue de la Barre and rue de Gand are a big hit with chic 30-somethings. Especially on Friday and Saturday nights, in the **rue Masséna student zone** (M République Beaux Arts) a university-age crowd descends on dozens of high-decibel bars along rue Masséna (750m southwest of the tourist office) and almost-perpendicular rue Solférino (as far southeast as Marché Sébastopol). London-style excess is not unknown here.

A number of edgy (and undercapitalised) cafés are tucked away around the periphery of place de la Nouvelle Aventure in **Wazemmes** (M Gambetta), site of the Wazemmes food market.

In the warm season, sidewalk cafés make the square in front of the Opéra, the **place du Théâtre** (M Rihour), a fine spot to sip beer and soak up the Flemish atmosphere.



### Meert

TEAROOM

(pronounced meh; [www.meert.fr](http://www.meert.fr); 27 rue Esquermoise; waffles €2.30; ☺9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 9am-7.30pm Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sun; M Rihour) *Gaufres* (waffles) made in a hinged iron griddle with Madagascar vanilla are the speciality at this luxury tearoom-cum-pastry-and-sweets-shop, which has served kings, viceroys and generals (including Charles de Gaulle, a life-long fan) since 1761. Next door, Meert's **chocolate shop** (per kg €89) has a wrought-iron balcony, coffered ceiling and painted wood panels that will transport you back to 1839.

### Café Le Relax

CAFÉ

(48 place de la Nouvelle Aventure, Wazemmes; espresso €1.30, beer €2.20; ☺7.30am or 8am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri, to 2am Sat; M Gambetta) Wazemmes denizens young and old drop by this ungentrified *café de quartier* (neighbourhood café) for an espresso or a strong Belgian beer – and to run into friends. A great place to get a feel for this

ethnically mixed, working-class part of town. Feel free to buy edibles at the nearby Wazemmes market and eat them here with a beer. Local groups perform live from about 9pm to midnight on Friday and Saturday and 7.30pm to 10.30pm on Sunday.



### Café Citoyen

CAFÉ

(<http://cafecitoyen.org>, in French; 7 place du Vieux Marché aux Chevaux; coffee €1.50, glass of wine €3.30; ☉noon-midnight Mon-Fri, 2-8pm Sat; @☎☎; M République Beaux Arts) A friendly, informal bar, run as a cooperative, with a social, ideological and environmental mission. Internet access is free if you order an organic microbrewed beer (€2.90), a glass of wine or a cup of fair-trade coffee from the friendly fellow in the Trotsky-style glasses. Also serves light meals (salads, soup, sandwiches), including vegetarian and vegan options; all products are organic and most are sourced directly from local producers.

### L'illustration Café

BAR-CAFÉ

([www.bar-lillustration.com](http://www.bar-lillustration.com), in French; 18 rue Royale; ☉12.30pm-3am Mon-Fri, 2pm-3am Sat, 3pm-3am Sun) Adorned with art nouveau woodwork and changing exhibits by local painters, this laid-back bar attracts artists, musicians, budding intellectuals and teachers in the mood to read, exchange weighty ideas – or just shoot the breeze. The sound track is mellow, ranging from Western classical to jazz, French chansons and African. Very French in the best sense of the word.

### Café Oz

PUB

(33 place Louise de Bettignies; ☉4pm-3am Mon-Fri, noon-3am Sat & Sun) Footy and rugby on a wide screen, Australian on the walls

#### DON'T MISS

### NORTHERN BREWS

French Flanders brews some truly excellent *bière blonde* (lager) and *bière ambrée* (amber beer) with an alcohol content of up to 8.5%. While in the area, beer lovers should be sure to try some of these brands, which give the Belgian brewers a run for their money: 3 Monts, Amadeus, Ambre des Flandres, Brasserie des 2 Caps, Ch'ti, Enfants de Gayant, Grain d'Orge, Hellemus, Jenlain, L'Angellus, La Wambrechies, Moulins d'Ascq, Raoul, Septante 5, St-Landelin, Triple Secret des Moines and Vieux Lille.

and cold bottles of Toohey's Extra Dry – what more could you ask for? Popular with English-speakers, including students, this place is packed when DJs do their thing from 9pm to 3am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. Opens at noon daily in nice weather and has a great warm-season terrace. Happy hour 6pm to 9pm Monday to Saturday.



### Entertainment

Lille's free French-language entertainment guide, *Sortir* ([www.lille.sortir.eu](http://www.lille.sortir.eu), in French), comes out each Wednesday and is available at the tourist office, cinemas, event venues and bookshops.

Tickets for Lille's rich cultural offerings can be bought at the **Fnac Billetterie** ([www.fnacspectacles.com](http://www.fnacspectacles.com), in French; 16 rue du Sec-Arembault; ☉10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat; M Rihour). Events details are posted by category on the walls and on flat screens.

### Cinemas

#### Cinéma Majestic

CINEMA

(☎08 36 68 00 73; [www.cinemaslumieres.com](http://www.cinemaslumieres.com), in French; 56 rue de Béthune; M Rihour) Non-dubbed films on six screens.

#### Cinéma Métropole

CINEMA

(☎08 36 68 00 73; [www.cinemaslumieres.com](http://www.cinemaslumieres.com), in French; 26 rue des Ponts des Comines; M Gare Lille-Flandres) An art-house cinema with nondubbed films on four screens.

### Gay & Lesbian

#### Tchouka Club

GAY DISCO

(80 rue Barthélemy Delespaul; admission free, beer €4, Champagne €10; ☉11pm-7am Fri, Sat & holiday eves) A till-dawn gay and lesbian disco that's got Lille's clubbing classes chattering. Has photo-montage wall murals, plenty of flashing lights, buff barmen in tank tops and a soundtrack that's heavy on electro, house and techno. So packed after 1am that you may have trouble getting in. Relaxed dress code. Has a Facebook page. Situated 700m due south of the Palais des Beaux-Arts.

#### Vice & Versa

GAY BAR

(3 rue de la Barre; ☉3pm-3am Mon-Sat, 4pm-3am Sun) The rainbow flies proudly at this well-heeled, sophisticated bar, which is as gay as it is popular (and it's very popular). Decor includes brick walls, a camp crystal chandelier and lots of red and green laser dots. Has 80s-themed nights from 10pm every Tuesday, a house-and-electro DJ from 10pm

on Friday and Saturday, and a *soirée* from 9pm on Sunday.

### Coming Out

GAY BAR

([www.comingout-lille.eu](http://www.comingout-lille.eu), in French; 11 rue de Gand; ☉5pm-midnight, until 1am Fri & 2am Sat) Popular with thirty-somethings, this relaxed bolthole welcomes punters – most of them gay and lesbian – with dancing laser dots, three Belgian beers on tap (€2.90) and a lounge area with coffee tables and low stools. The eclectic soundtrack ranges from French chansons and 80s to techno, trending to house and dance on Friday and Saturday. A good source of information on the local gay scene.

### Nightclubs

Although you no longer have to cross the Belgian frontier (eg to Gand) to dance past 4am, some locals still do because, they say, the techno is edgier, the prices lower, substances more available and the closing time even later (1pm!).

### TOP CHOICE Network Café

DISCO

([www.network-cafe.net](http://www.network-cafe.net), in French; 15 rue du Faisan; admission free, beer €4; ☉10.30pm-5.30am Tue & Wed, 9.30pm-5.30am Thu, 10.30pm-7am Fri & Sat, 7pm-5am Sun; ☐ République Beaux Arts) At Lille's hottest discotheque, you can sip beer and boogie in the main hall, presided over by two 5m-high statues from faraway lands, or in the baroque Venetian room, decked out with velvet settees and crystal chandeliers. A magnet for guest DJs, Network is hugely popular with students (especially on Tuesday and Wednesday) and the 20-to-40 crowd. On Sunday salsa/R & B dominate before/after midnight. From 9.30pm to 11.30pm on Thursday you can learn the proper way to dance to rock music (€5). The door policy is pretty strict – locals dress up – but tends to be a bit more relaxed for tourists. Situated 600m northwest of the Palais des Beaux-Arts.

### Duke's Club

DISCO

([www.dukesclub.fr](http://www.dukesclub.fr), in French; 6-8 rue Gosselin; admission free, coat check €1.50, beer €5; ☉9pm-dawn Wed-Sat) A traditional disco with three bars and three dance spaces on three levels (used simultaneously only on Saturday night), theme nights (see the website), and black light that makes white shirts glow a radioactive purple. Most of the bouncing bods in the 30-to-50 age range. To learn the 'correct' way to dance to rock music, drop by from 9.30pm to 11pm on Friday for a pro-

fessional lesson (€6, including two drinks). Situated 600m southeast of the Palais des Beaux-Arts.



### Shopping

Lille's snazziest clothing and housewares boutiques are in Vieux Lille, in the area bounded by rue de la Monnaie, rue Esquemoise, rue de la Grande Chaussée (a window shopper's paradise!) and rue d'Angleterre. Keep an eye out for shops (eg at 23 rue Masurel) specialising in French Flemish edibles, including cheeses. For mid-range prices, locals often head to the hugely popular pedestrians-only zone south of place du Général de Gaulle (all near Rihour metro), including rue Neuve, rue de Béthune, rue des Tanneurs and rue du Sec-Arembault.



### Maisons de Mode

FASHION

([www.maisonsdemode.com](http://www.maisonsdemode.com)) Cool, cutting-edge couture by promising young designers can be found in two clusters of studio-boutiques, **Faubourg des Modes** (Nos 31, 51 & 58-60 rue du Faubourg des Postes, Lille Sud; ☐ Porte des Postes), about 2.5km southwest of the Palais des Beaux-Arts, and around **La Piscine Musée d'Art et d'Industrie** (rue de l'Espérance & av Jean Lebas, Roubaix; ☐ Gare Jean Lebas), 12km northeast of Gare Lille-Europe.

### Le Furet du Nord

BOOKSHOP

(15 place du Général de Gaulle; ☐ Rihour) One of Europe's largest bookshops. Has a good selection of English-language books, including LP guides and titles on Flanders and France.

### Alice Délice

KITCHEN SUPPLIES

(5 Rue Esquemoise; ☐ Rihour) Almost every utensil and gadget a French kitchen might need – great for gifts!

### Euralille

SHOPPING MALL

([www.euralille.com](http://www.euralille.com), in French; cnr av Le Corbusier & av Willy Brandt; ☉10am-8pm Mon-Sat; ☐ Gare Lille-Flandres or Gare Lille-Europe) A vast shopping mall with 120 popularly priced shops.



### Information

**Commercial banks** (along rue National; ☐ Rihour)

**Hobby Max** (9 rue Maertens; per hr €3; ☉9am-9pm; ☐ République Beaux Arts) Internet access on 16 machines.

**Hôpital Roger Salengro** (☎03 20 44 61 40/41; rue du Professeur Émile Laine; ☉24hr; ☐ CHR B Calmette) The *accueil urgences* (emergency

room/casualty ward) of Lille's vast, 15-hospital Cité Hospitalière is 4km southwest of the city centre.

**International Currency Exchange** (☎7.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun; ☑Gare Lille-Europe) Currency exchange in Gare Lille-Europe, next to accès (track access) H.

**Net Arena** (10 rue des Bouchers; per hr €3; ☎10am-10pm Mon-Sat, 2-8pm Sun) Internet access on about 30 computers. Situated half a block south of the bar Vice & Versa.

**SOS Médecins** (☎03 20 29 91 91; 3 av Louise Michel; ☎24hr; ☑Porte de Douai) Round-the-clock medical clinic (call ahead from 11pm to 9am) and house calls by doctors.

**Tourist office** (☎from abroad 03 59 57 94 00, in France 08 91 56 20 04; www.lilletourism.com; place Rihour; ☎9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun & holidays; ☑Rihour) Occupies what's left of the Flamboyant Gothic-style Palais Rihour, built in the mid-1400s for Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy; a war memorial forms the structure's eastern side. Has free maps and an excellent map-brochure (€2) outlining walking tours of five city *quartiers*. Can exchange small amounts of foreign currency but the rate is poor.

**Travelex exchange bureau** (☎8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun & holidays; ☑Gare Lille-Flandres) Currency exchange in Gare Lille-Flandres, next to ticket counter N.

## **i** Getting There & Away

### Bus

**Eurolines** (☎08 92 89 90 91; www.eurolines.fr; 23 parvis St-Maurice; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sat; ☑Gare Lille-Flandres) serves cities such as Brussels (€17, 1½ hours), Amsterdam (€42, five hours) and London (€35, 5½ hours; by day via the Channel Tunnel, at night by ferry). Buses depart from bd de Leeds, to the left as you arrive at Gare Lille-Europe from the city centre (look for the 'Eurolines' sign behind the taxi rank).

### Car

Driving into Lille is incredibly confusing, even with a good map. To get to the city centre, the best thing to do is to suspend your sense of direction and blindly follow the 'Centre Ville' signs.

Parking at the **Champ de Mars** (bd de la Liberté), a P+R (park-and-ride) car park 1.2km northwest of the tourist office (next to the Citadelle), costs €3.20 a day, including return travel (for up to five people) to central Lille on the Citadine bus line (just show the driver the card issued at the entrance barrier). If you arrive between 8pm and 7am or on a Sunday or holiday, parking is free – but you don't get a free bus ticket into the centre.

Parking is free along some of the streets southwest of rue Solferino and up around the Maison Natale de Charles de Gaulle.

**Avis, Europcar, Hertz and National-Citer** have car-hire offices in Gare Lille-Europe. Domestic rental companies:

**DLM** (☎03 20 06 18 80; www.dlm.fr, in French; 32 place de la Gare; ☑Gare Lille-Flandres)

**Locauto** (☎03 20 57 02 25; www.locauto.fr; 2 rue Gustave Delory; ☑Mairie de Lille)

**Rent-a-Car Système** (☎03 20 40 20 20; www.rentacar.fr, in French; 113 rue du Molinel; ☑Rihour)

### Train

Lille's two main train stations, old-fashioned Gare Lille-Flandres and ultramodern Gare Lille-Europe, are 400m apart on the eastern edge of the city centre. They are one stop apart on metro line 2 (in the Gare Lille-Europe metro station, look for the fabulous mural). Lille has been linked to Paris by rail since 1846.

For details on getting to/from Amiens, Arras, Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk, see those sections.

**Gare Lille-Flandres** (☑Gare Lille-Flandres) Used by almost all intra-regional services and almost all TGVs to Paris' Gare du Nord (€40 to €55, one hour, 14 to 18 daily).


**Gare Lille-Europe** (☑Gare Lille-Europe) Topped by what looks like a 20-storey ski boot, this ultramodern station handles province-to-province TGVs, including services to Charles de Gaulle Airport (€40 to €55, one hour, at least hourly), Nice (€117 to €138, 7½ hours, two direct daily) and Strasbourg (€84 to €106, 3¼ to four hours, three direct daily); Eurostar trains (p973) to London (departures are from the station's far northern end); TGVs/Eurostars to Brussels-Nord (Monday to Friday €26, weekend & holidays €18, 35 minutes, a dozen daily).

## **i** Getting Around

### Bicycle & Segway

**Station Oxygène** (☎03 20 81 44 02; team-segway@transpole.fr; Segway per 30 minutes/half-/full day €4/15/20, with bus ticket stamped within the hour €3.50/12/18, electric bicycle €1.50/7/10) Cruising around Lille by Segway – it's so noughties but still really cool! First-time riders (minimum age 18; if accompanied by an adult, 16) must take an intro lesson (€4) to get a Segway licence (we're not kidding). Credit card deposit of €500 required. Run by Transpole (the public transport company), which has two rental locations:

**Champ de Mars** (bd de la Liberté; ☎10am-6pm or 7pm, closed Sat & Sun Sep or Oct-Mar) A shiny glass structure that resembles a hovering flying saucer, next to the Citadelle.

**Transpole information office** (Gare Lille-Flandres; ☎7.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri;  Gare Lille-Flandres) On the track level at the station's place des Buisses exit.

## Bus, Tram & Metro

Lille's two speedy metro lines (1 and 2), two tramways (R and T), two Citadine shuttles (C1, which circles the city centre in a clockwise direction, and C2, which goes the other way) and many urban and suburban bus lines – several of which cross into Belgium – are run by **Transpole** (☎08 20 42 40 40; [www.transpole.fr](http://www.transpole.fr)). In the city centre, metros run every two to four minutes until about 12.30am. Useful metro stops include those at the train stations, Rihour (next to the tourist office), République Beaux Arts (near the Palais des Beaux-Arts), Gambetta (near the Wazemmes food market) and Gare Jean Lebas (near La Piscine). In this chapter, places with a metro stop within 500m have the name of the stop noted next to the street address.

Tickets (€1.30; valid for transfers for up to one hour) are sold on buses but must be purchased (and validated in the orange posts) *before* boarding a metro or tram. A pack (*carte*) of 10 tickets costs €10.60. A Pass' Journée (all-day pass) costs €3.60 and needs to be time-stamped just once. A Pass Soirée, good for unlimited travel after 7pm, costs €1.60.

## Taxi

**Taxi Gare Lille** (☎03 20 06 64 00; ☎24hr)

**Taxi Rihour** (☎03 20 55 20 56; ☎24hr)

## Calais

POP 76,200

As Churchill might have put it, 'never in the field of human tourism have so many travellers passed through a place and so few stopped to visit'. There would seem to be few compelling reasons for the 15 million people who travel by way of Calais each year to stop and explore – pity the local tourist office, whose job it is to snag a few of the Britons racing south to warmer climes – but in fact the town *is* worth at least a brief stopover.

The city, a mere 34km from the English town of Dover (Douvres in French), makes a convenient base for exploring the majestic Côte d'Opale by car or public transport.



## Sights & Activities



**Cité Internationale de la Dentelle et de la Mode**

LACE MUSEUM

(International Centre of Lace & Fashion; ☎03 21 00 42 30; [www.cite-dentelle.fr](http://www.cite-dentelle.fr); 135 quai du Com-

merce; adult €5; ☎10am-5pm or 6pm, closed Tue) Walk past the bizarre topiary and you'll enter the intricate world of lace-making, the industry that once made Calais a textile powerhouse. Opened in 2009, the informative, cutting-edge exhibits trace the history of lace from the early centuries of hand-knotting (some stunning samples are on display). The highlight is watching a century-old mechanical loom with 3500 vertical threads and 11,000 horizontal ones bang, clatter and clunk according to instructions given by perforated Jacquard cards. Signs are in French, English and Dutch. Situated 500m southeast of the Hôtel de Ville.

## Burgers of Calais

STATUE

Rodin sculpted *Les Bourgeois de Calais* in 1895 to honour six local citizens who, in 1347, after eight months of holding off the besieging English forces, surrendered themselves and the keys to the starving city to Edward III. Their hope: that by sacrificing themselves they might save the town and its people. Moved by the entreaties of his consort, Philippa, Edward eventually spared both the Calaisiens and their six brave leaders.

Calais' cast of this world-famous work can be found in the formal garden in front of the Flemish Renaissance-style **Hôtel de Ville** (built 1911–25), whose Unesco World Heritage-listed **belfry** is being renovated; by the time you read this, it should be possible to take a lift up to the top.

## Musée Mémoire 1939–1945

WAR MUSEUM

(☎03 21 34 21 57; <http://museeguerrecalais.free.fr>; adult incl audioguide €6; ☎10am-6pm) Housed in a concrete bunker built as a German naval headquarters, this WWII museum displays thousands of period artefacts, including weapons, uniforms and proclamations. Situated incongruously in flowery **Parc St-Pierre**, next to a boules ground and a **children's playground**.

## Beachfront

BEACH

The unique attraction at Calais' cabin-lined **beach**, which begins 1km northwest of place d'Armes, is watching huge car ferries as they sail majestically to and from Dover. The sand continues westward along 8km-long, dune-lined **Blériot Plage**, named after the pioneer aviator Louis Blériot, who began the first ever trans-Channel flight from here in 1909. Both beaches are served by buses 3, 5 and 9.





## Sleeping

Lots of budget hotels can be found along, and just east of, rue Royale.



### Hôtel Meurice

TRADITIONAL HOTEL €€

(☎03 21 34 57 03; www.hotel-meurice.fr; 5-7 rue Edmond Roche; d €85-150; @☎) A veteran hotel with 39 rooms and plenty of atmosphere thanks to the grand lobby staircase, antiques furnishings, a Hemingwayesque bar and a breakfast room with garden views.

### Auberge de Jeunesse

HOSTEL €

(☎03 21 34 70 20; www.auberge-jeunesse-calais.com; av Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny; s incl breakfast €26, 2-bed dm per person €19; ☎24hr; ☎) Modern, well equipped and just 200m from the beach, with 162 beds. Served by buses 3, 5 and 9.

The following are in Coquelles, near the Channel Tunnel vehicle-loading area.

### Hôtel Ibis

CHAIN HOTEL €€

(☎03 21 46 37 00; www.ibishotel.com; place de Cantorbéry; d Mon-Thu €71, Fri-Sun €77)

### Etap Hôtel

CHAIN HOTEL €

(☎08 92 68 30 59; www.etaphotel.com; place de Cantorbéry; s/tr from €39/45)



## Eating

Restaurants ring place d'Armes and are plentiful just south of there along rue Royale.

### Histoire Ancienne

BISTRO €

(☎03 21 34 11 20; www.histoire-ancienne.com; 20 rue Royale; weekday lunch & 6-8pm dinner menus €13-16, other menus €19-37; ☎closed Sun & dinner Mon) A 1930s Paris-style bistro specialising in French and regional meat, fish and vegetarian mains, some grilled over an open wood fire.

## Calais

### Top Sights

Cité Internationale de la Dentelle et de la Mode .....D7

### Sights

- 1 Burghers of Calais Statue.....B6
- 2 Children's Playground.....A7
- 3 Hôtel de Ville.....C6
- 4 Musée Mémoire 1939-1945.....A6

### Sleeping

- 5 Hôtel Meurice.....B4

### Eating

- 6 Histoire Ancienne .....B4
- 7 Match Supermarket.....B3

## Match

SUPERMARKET €

(place d'Armes; ☎8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun) For picnic supplies.



## Shopping

### Cité Europe

SHOPPING MALL

(www.cite-europe.com; 1001 bd du Kent, Coquelles; ☎10am-8pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 10am-9pm Fri) Has 20 restaurants, 12 cinema screens and 140 shops, including a vast **Carrefour hypermarket** (☎8.30am-9pm Mon-Wed, 8.30am-10pm Thu-Sat). Situated next to the vehicle-loading area for the Channel Tunnel; from the A16, take exits 41 or 43.

### L'Usine Côte d'Opale

FACTORY OUTLETS

(www.usinecotedopale.fr, in French; bd du Parc, Coquelles; ☎10am-7pm Mon-Sat) Discount clothing and accessories from 80 name brands. From the A16, take exit 41.

## Information

Exchange rates aboard car ferries are inferior. Inexplicably, the car-ferry terminal lacks an ATM.

**Bureau de Change** (1 rue Royale; ☎9-11am & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 2-4.30pm Sat) Currency exchange at atrocious rates.

**Ferry Terminal Exchange Bureau** (☎9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-2.30pm Sat)

**Tourist office** (☎03 21 96 62 40; www.calais-cotedopale.com; 12 bd Georges Clemenceau; ☎10am-6pm) Situated two blocks southwest of place du Général de Gaulle.

## Getting There & Away

For details crossing the English Channel by ferry and rail, see p973 and p972.

### Boat

Each day, about 38 car ferries from Dover dock at Calais' bustling car-ferry terminal, situated about 1.5km northeast of place d'Armes (by car the distance is double that). Ferry company offices:

**P&O Ferries** (www.poferries.com) Calais town centre (41 place d'Armes); car-ferry parking lot (☎24hr); car-ferry terminal (☎6am-10pm) P&O is the only ferry company that still takes foot passengers across the Strait of Dover.

**SeaFrance** (www.seafrance.com) Calais town centre (2 place d'Armes); car-ferry parking lot (☎24hr) No longer takes foot passengers.

Shuttle buses (€2, roughly hourly from 11am to 6pm or 7pm) link Gare Calais-Ville (the train station) and place d'Armes (the stop is in front of Café de la Tour) with the car-ferry terminal. Departure times are posted at the stops.

## Bus

Bus 44, run by **Inglard** (☎03 21 96 49 54; [www.colvert-littoral.com](http://www.colvert-littoral.com), in French; office in car-ferry terminal), follows the breathtaking Côte d'Opale coastal road (D940) to Sangatte, Wissant (€3.20), Ambleteuse, Wimereux and Boulogne-sur-Mer (€5.50, 1¼ hours, three daily Mon-Sat except holidays), where the stops are at Nausicaä and place de France (quai V, in front of the post office).

**Ligne BCD** (☎08 00 62 00 59; [www.ligne-bcd.com](http://www.ligne-bcd.com), in French) links Calais' train station (hours posted) with Dunkirk (€8, 50 minutes, 11 daily Monday to Friday, three on Saturday).

## Car & Motorcycle

To reach the Channel Tunnel's vehicle-loading area at Coquelles, about 6km southwest of Calais' town centre, follow the road signs on the A16 to 'Tunnel Sous La Manche' (Tunnel under the Channel) and get off at exit 42.

**ADA** (☎03 21 96 49 54), **Avis**, **Budget**, **Eurocar**, **Hertz** and **National-Citer** have offices inside the car-ferry terminal but they're not always staffed.

## Train

Calais has two train stations, linked by trains and a *navette* (shuttle bus; €2, free with train ticket).

**Gare Calais-Ville**, in the city centre, has direct services to Amiens (€24, 2½ to 3½ hours, six or seven daily), Boulogne (€7.50, 30 minutes, 19 daily Monday to Friday, 11 on Saturday, six on Sunday), Dunkirk (€8, 50 minutes, four to six daily Monday to Friday, two or three on Saturday) and Lille-Flandres (€16, 1¼ hours, 19 daily Monday to Friday, eight to 10 daily on weekend).

**Gare Calais-Fréthun**, a TGV station 10km southwest of town near the Channel Tunnel entrance, is served by TGVs to Paris' Gare du Nord (€41 to €62, 1½ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) as well as Eurostars to London St Pancras (€149, one hour, three daily).

## Côte d'Opale

For a dramatic and beautiful introduction to France, head to the 40km of cliffs, sand dunes and beaches between Calais and Boulogne, known as the Côte d'Opale (Opal Coast) because of the ever-changing interplay of greys and blues in the sea and sky. The coastal peaks (frequently buffeted by gale-force winds), wide beaches and rolling farmland are dotted with the remains of Nazi Germany's Atlantic Wall, a chain of fortifications and gun emplacements built to prevent the Allied invasion that in the end took place in Normandy. The seashore

has been attracting British beach-lovers since the Victorian era.

Part of the **Parc Naturel Régional des Caps et Marais d'Opale** (Opal Coast Headlands & Marshes Regional Park; [www.parc-opale.fr](http://www.parc-opale.fr)), the Côte d'Opale area is criss-crossed by hiking paths, including the **GR120 trail** (red-and-white trail markings) that hugs the coast – except where the cliffs are in danger of collapse. Some routes are also suitable for mountain biking and horse riding. Each village along the Côte d'Opale has at least one campground, and most have places to eat.

By car, D940 offers some truly spectacular vistas. For details on Inglard's bus 44, which links all the villages mentioned below with Calais and Boulogne, see left.

The Channel Tunnel slips under the Strait of Dover 8km west of Calais at the village of **Sangatte**, known for its wide beach. Southwest of there, the coastal dunes give way to cliffs that culminate in windswept, 134m-high **Cap Blanc-Nez**, which affords breathtaking views of the Bay of Wissant, the port of Calais, the Flemish countryside (pock-marked by Allied bomb craters) and

### WORTH A TRIP

#### LA COUPOLE

A top-secret subterranean V2 launch site just five minutes' flying time from London – almost (but not quite) put into operation in 1944 – now houses **La Coupole** (☎03 21 12 27 27; [www.lacoupole.com](http://www.lacoupole.com); adult/family incl audio-guide €9/19.50; ☎9am-6pm, closed 2 weeks around Christmas), an innovative museum that presents information using film and images:

- » Nazi Germany's secret programs to build V1 and V2 rockets, which could fly at 650km/h and an astounding 5780km/h respectively
- » Life in northern France during the Nazi occupation
- » The postwar conquest of space with the help of V2 rocket technology – and seconded V2 engineers

La Coupole is 49km southeast of Calais just outside the town of Wizernes, near the intersection of D928 and D210. From A26, take exit 3 or 4.

the distant cliffs of Kent. The grey **obelisk** (erected 1922), a short walk up the hill from the parking area, honours the WWI Dover Patrol. Paths lead to a number of massive, concrete German bunkers and gun emplacements.

The tidy and very French seaside resort of **Wissant** is a good base for walks in the rolling countryside and along the beach between Cap Blanc-Nez to Cap Gris-Nez; check the tides at the **tourist office** (☎08 20 20 76 00; ☉9.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat) before setting out or you may get trapped between a rock and a wet place. Wissant boasts a vast fine-sand beach where you can admire England from afar – in 55 BC Julius Caesar launched his invasion of Britain from here.

**Hôtel Le Vivier** (☎03 21 35 93 61; www.levivier.com; place de l'Église, Wissant; d incl breakfast €60-90), across the street from the church and next to a millpond, has 39 nicely appointed rooms and a homey, nautically themed **restaurant** (menus €15-30; ☉closed Tue & Wed low season) specialising in fresh local fish and seafood. There are several other hotels right nearby.

Topped by a lighthouse and a radar station serving the 600 ships that pass by each day, the 45m-high cliffs of **Cap Gris-Nez** are only 28km from the white cliffs of the English coast. The name – Grey Nose – is a corruption of the archaic English 'craigness', meaning 'rocky promontory'. The area is a stopping-off point for millions of migrating birds.

Oodles of WWII hardware, including a massive, rail-borne German artillery piece with a range of 86km, are on display at the **Musée du Mur de l'Atlantique** (Atlantic Wall Museum; ☎03 21 32 97 33; www.batterietodt.com, in French; adult/child €6/3; ☉10am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun, closed Dec & Jan), housed in a Brobdingnagian German pillbox. It is just southwest of Audinghen, 500m off D940.

The village of **Ambleteuse**, on the north-east side of the mouth of the River Slack, is blessed with a lovely beach that was once defended from attack by the 17th-century **Fort d'Ambleteuse**, designed by Vauban (that's why it's also known as Fort Vauban). Just south of town is a protected area of grass-covered dunes known as **Dunes de la Slack**.

The neatly organised **Musée 39-45** (☎03 21 87 33 01; www.musee3945.com; adult/

child €6.50/4.50; ☉10am-6pm, closed Dec-Feb), at the northern edge of Ambleteuse, features realistic tableaux of WWII military and civilian life, and a 25-minute film. The dashing but wildly impractical French officers' dress uniforms of 1931 hint at why France fared so badly on the battlefield in 1940. Popular wartime songs accompany your visit. You can buy picnic supplies next door at the **Shop supermarket** (☉closed Sun afternoon).

## Boulogne-sur-Mer

POP 44,600

The most interesting of France's Channel ports, Boulogne makes a pretty good first stop in France, especially if combined with a swing north through the Côte d'Opale. The Basse Ville (Lower City) is an uninspiring assemblage of postwar structures but the attractive Ville Haute (Upper City), perched high above the rest of town, is girded by a 13th-century wall. The biggest draw is Nausicaä, one of Europe's premier aquariums.

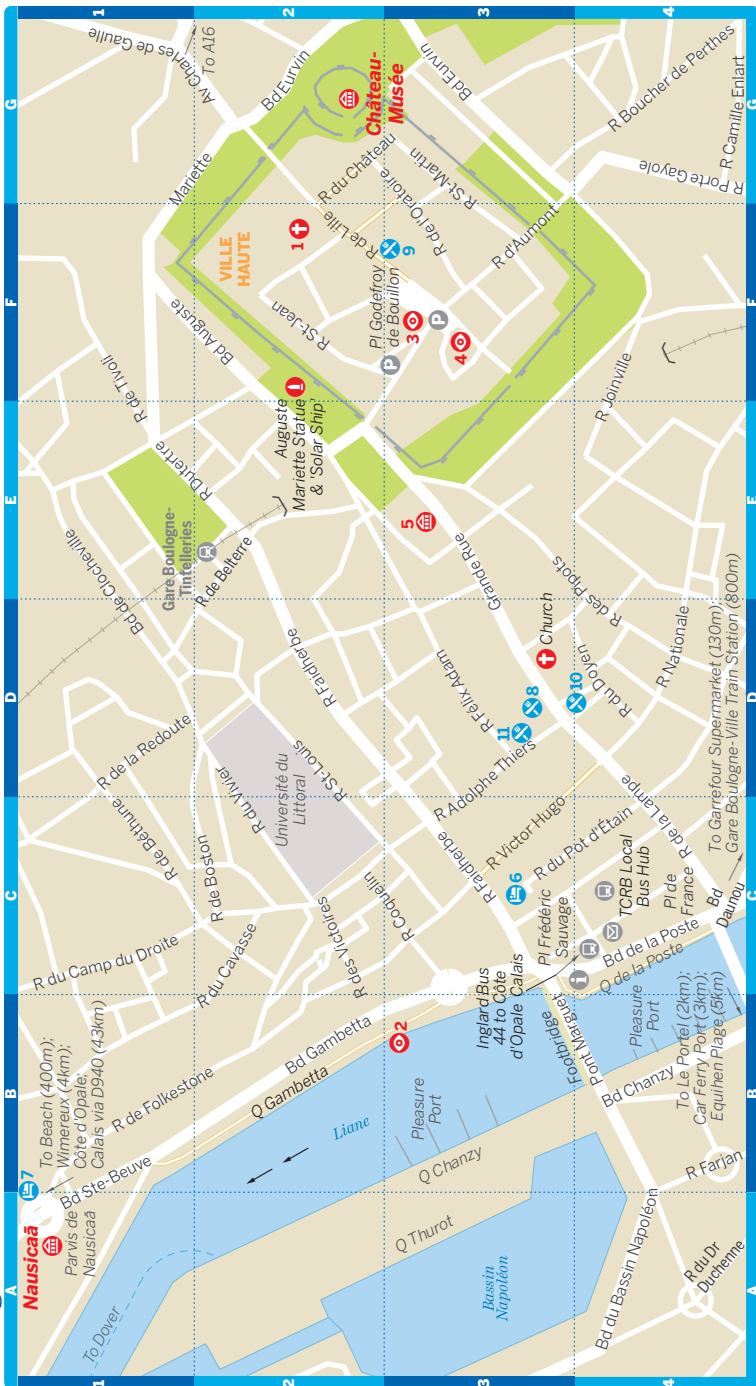
Auguste Mariette (1821–81), the archaeologist who founded Cairo's Egyptian Museum, was born here, which is why Boulogne has a number of sculptures and artefacts related to the Pharaohs.

## Sights

### Nausicaä

AQUARIUM

(French Sea Experience Centre; ☎03 21 30 99 99; www.nausicaa.fr; bd Ste-Beuve; adult/student/child €17.50/12/11.50, audioguide €3.20; ☉9.30am-6.30pm, closed 3 weeks in Jan) This superb aquarium complex, a few hundred metres north of the fishing port along quai Gambetta, lets you get up close and personal with see-through jellyfish, 250kg adult sharks (compare them to the shark eggs and hatchlings housed in a tiny tank), toothy speckled caimans (in the **Submerged Forest**), North Sea fish you usually see *au beurre* or *au gratin*, and arawanas, fish that can hop out of the water to pluck birds from overhanging branches (wearers of fancy feathered hats, beware!). Kid-friendly activities include feeding sessions and fish petting. Also a hit with younger visitors: California sea lions and African penguins, including young 'uns hatched right here. Details on the day's activities appear on



flat-screen bulletin boards. All signs are in French and English.

## Ville Haute

HISTORIC QUARTER

You can walk all the way around the Upper City – a hilltop island of centuries-old buildings and cobblestone streets – atop the rectangular, tree-shaded **ramparts**, a distance of just under 1.5km. Among the impressive buildings around place Godefroy de Bouillon are the neoclassical **Hôtel Desandrouin**, built in the 1780s and later used by Napoléon, and the brick **hôtel de ville** (1735), with its square medieval **belfry** (ground floor accessible through the lobby).

**Basilique Notre Dame** (rue de Lille; ☉10am-noon & 2-5pm or 6pm), its towering, Italianate dome visible from all over town (and best admired from the ramparts), is an odd structure built from 1827 to 1866 with little input from trained architects. The partly Romanesque **crypt and treasury** (admission €2; ☉2-5pm Tue-Sun) are eminently skippable.

The cultures of the world mix and mingle inside the **Château-Musée** (Castle Museum; ☐03 21 10 02 20; adult/student €3/free; ☉museum 10am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm, closed Tue, courtyard 7am-7pm daily), one of the few places on earth where you can admire Egyptian antiquities (including a mummy) next to 19th-century Inuit masks and compare Andean ceramics with Grecian urns, with an in-situ 4th-century Roman wall thrown in for good measure – all inside a 13th-century fortified castle.

## Boulogne-sur-Mer

### 📍 Top Sights

Château-Musée.....	G2
Nausicaä.....	A1

### 📍 Sights

1 Basilique Notre Dame.....	F2
2 Fishing Port.....	B3
3 Hôtel de Ville.....	F3
4 Hôtel Desandrouin.....	F3
5 Museo Libertador San Martín.....	E3

### 🏠 Sleeping

6 Hôtel Faïdherbe.....	C3
7 Hôtel La Matelote.....	B1

### 🍴 Eating

8 Fromagerie.....	D3
9 L'îlot Vert.....	F3
10 Marché.....	D4
11 Trésor du Vin.....	D3

## FREE Museo Libertador San Martín

MUSEUM

(113 Grande Rue; www.ambassadeargentine.net, in French; ☉10am-noon & 2-6pm Tue-Sat, closed Jan & 2 weeks Jul) Boulogne's most unexpected sight is the house where José de San Martín, the exiled hero of Argentine, Chilean and Peruvian independence, died in 1850. Ring the bell to visit an expatriated slice of 19th-century South America, complete with memorabilia related to San Martín's life and lots of gaudy military uniforms. Owned by the Argentine government, it is staffed by Argentine army personnel.

## Basse Ville

PORT

At the **fishing port** (quai Gambetta), hungry seagulls dive and squawk overhead as they survey the fishing boats and the *poissonniers* (fishmongers) selling freshly landed *cabillaud* (Atlantic cod), *carrelet* (plaice) and sole – Boulogne's most important commercial fish – as well as *bar* (sea bass), mullet, *raie* (skate) and turbot. Take a good look so you know what you're getting next time you order *poisson* (fish).

Boulogne's lively **shopping precinct** is centred on rue Victor Hugo and rue Adolphe Thiers.

## Seashore

BEACHES

Boulogne's **beach** begins just north of Nausicaä, across the mouth of the Liane from a whirling wind farm on the one-time site of a steelworks.

There are other fine beaches 4km north of town at **Wimereux** (served two to four times per hour by buses 1 and 2 from place de France), a partly belle époque-style resort founded by Napoléon in 1806; 2.5km southwest at **Le Portel** (bus 23 from place de France); and 5km south at **Equihen Plage** (bus Ea or Eb from the train station or place de France). Note: Sunday bus numbers end in 'd'.



## Sleeping

### Hôtel La Matelote

HOTEL €€

(☐03 21 30 33 33; www.la-matelote.com; 70 bd Ste-Beuve; d Sun-Thu €100-160, Fri, Sat & holidays €115-185; ☉☉☉) Boulogne's plushest hotel has a luxurious jacuzzi, *hammam* (Turkish sauna) and dry sauna. The 35 spacious rooms, many decorated in rich shades of red and gold, have ultramodern bathrooms and classic wood furnishings, and some come with balconies. Wheelchair access available. Situated a few hundred

metres north of the fishing port along quai Gambetta.

### Hôtel Faidherbe

HOTEL €

(☎03 21 31 60 93; [www.hotelfaidherbe.fr](http://www.hotelfaidherbe.fr); 12 rue Faidherbe; d/q €66/99; 🍷) Every guest elicits some sort of response from the house mascot, a myna bird named Victor – his repertoire includes laughing throatily, coughing and squawking ‘*bonjour*’, ‘*au revoir*’ and ‘bye-bye’. The 33 rooms are smallish but modern, flowery and practical.

### Auberge de Jeunesse

HOSTEL €

(☎03 21 99 15 30; [www.hihostels.com](http://www.hihostels.com); place Rouget de Lisle; dm incl breakfast & sheets €19, s €25; 🕒closed 22 Dec-Jan; 🍷🍷) This 137-bed outfit has a bar, a lounge area and spacious rooms with a timer-activated shower, toilet and two to five beds. Kitchen facilities are available. Situated about 1km south of the Basse Ville, facing the train station.



### Eating & Drinking

Thanks to its ready supply, Boulogne is an excellent place for fresh fish (everything except the salmon is likely to have been landed locally). In the Ville Haute, rue de Lille is lined with intimate restaurants (eg **L'ilot Vert** at No 36). In the Basse Ville, there's a selection of eateries in the area around place Dalton and rue du Doyen.

### La Matelote

FRENCH €€

(☎03 21 30 17 97; 80 bd Ste-Beuve; menus €29-74; 🕒lunch Thu) A stylish establishment with white tablecloths, paper-thin wine glasses, fine porcelain and one Michelin star. Serves *cuisine de saveurs* (cuisine that ‘mixes savours and flavours’, or something like that) with a focus on fish and seafood. La Matelote also runs the excellent beach-view **bistro** (🕒closed dinner Sun, also closed dinner Mon Sep-May) inside Nausicaä.

### Self-Catering

#### Fromagerie

CHEESE SHOP €

(23 Grande Rue; 🕒closed morning Mon) For an excellent selection of local cheeses.

#### Trésor de Vin

WINE SHOP €

(12 rue Adolphe Thiers; 🕒closed Sun & Mon) A wine shop by and for people who are passionate about wine.

#### Marché

FOOD MARKET €

(place Dalton; 🕒morning Wed & Sat)

#### Carrefour Market

SUPERMARKET €

(53 bd Daunou)

## i Information

Several commercial banks can be found on or near rue Victor Hugo. Money can be changed aboard LP Ferries' trans-Channel car ferries.

**Art et Image** (87 rue Victor Hugo; ☎9.30am-6.45pm Tue-Sat, also open Mon Jun-Aug; per hr €4) Has an internet computer where you can print out ferry tickets.

**Tourist office** (☎03 21 10 88 10; [www.tourisme-boulognesurmer.com](http://www.tourisme-boulognesurmer.com); parvis de Nauticaä; 🕒10am-noon & 1.30-6pm or 7pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Sun) Has useful English brochures.

**Tourist office annexe** (forum Jean Noël; 🕒9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun & holiday) Located in an octagonal pavilion.

## i Getting There & Around

**BOAT** For information on **LD Lines** (☎03 21 22 34 77; [www.ldlines.co.uk](http://www.ldlines.co.uk)) car ferries to Dover (foot passengers not permitted), see p973. The new ferry port is 3km west of the city centre.

**BUS** For details on buses to Calais via the gorgeous Côte d'Opale, see p168.

**TAXI** To order a cab, call ☎03 21 91 25 00.

**TRAIN** The main train station, **Gare Boulogne-Ville**, is 1.2km southeast of the centre. Destinations include Amiens (€18.50, 1½ hours, seven to nine daily), Calais-Ville (€7.50, 30 minutes, 19 daily Monday to Friday, 11 on Saturday, six on Sunday), Gare Lille-Flandres or Gare Lille-Europe (€19.50, one to two hours, nine to 12 daily) and Paris' Gare du Nord (€33, 2¾ hours, four or five direct daily).

## Dunkirk

POP 69,500

In 1940, Dunkirk (Dunkerque) – the name means ‘church of the dunes’ in Flemish – became world famous, and was flattened, almost simultaneously (p173). Rebuilt during one of the most uninspired periods in the entire history of Western architecture, the modern city has precious little charm but does offer visitors worthwhile museums, a family-popular beach and colourful pre-Lent carnivals.



## Sights & Activities

The **Musée Portuaire** (Harbour Museum; [www.museeportuaire.com](http://www.museeportuaire.com); 9 quai de la Citadelle; adult/family €5/13; 🕒10am-12.45pm & 1.30-6pm, closed Tue), housed in a one-time tobacco warehouse, will delight fans of maritime history and, especially, of model ships. Guided **tours** (adult/family incl museum



## EVACUATION OF DUNKIRK

In late May of 1940, as Nazi armies closed in, 1400 naval vessels and 'little ships' – fishing boats and pleasure craft crewed by civilian volunteers – braved intense German artillery and air attacks to ferry 340,000 Allied soldiers to the safety of England. Conducted in the difficult first year of WWII, this unplanned and chaotic evacuation – dubbed Operation Dynamo – failed to save any heavy equipment but was nevertheless seen as a heroic demonstration of Britain's resourcefulness and determination.

€10/25) take visitors aboard a lighthouse ship, a *peniche* (barge) and the *Duchesse Anne*, a three-masted training ship built for the German merchant marine in 1901 and acquired by France as WWII reparations. Some signs are in English. Situated 500m northwest of the tourist office.

To get a feel for the 1940 evacuation, drop by the not-for-profit **Mémorial du Souvenir** (☎03 28 26 27 81; www.dynamo-dunkerque.com; rue des Chantiers de France; adult/under 12yr €3.50/free; ☉10am-noon & 2-5pm Apr-Sep), a museum whose highlights include a 12-minute film, scale models and evocative period uniforms, weapons and photos.

The **Dunkirk British Memorial** (D601), honouring over 4500 British and Commonwealth soldiers 'with no known grave', is next to a **Commonwealth military cemetery** 1.5km southeast of the tourist office.

**Malo-les-Bains**, 2km northeast of Dunkirk's city centre, is a faded turn-of-the-20th-century seaside resort whose broad, sandy beach, **Plage des Alliés**, is named in honour of the Allied troops evacuated to England during Operation Dynamo. A bit to the northeast, off Zuydecoote, the **wrecks** of vessels sunk in 1940 can be visited on scuba dives, and a handful are accessible on foot during especially low tides (the tourist office has details of guided tours).

Stretching east from Malo-les-Bains to the Belgian border, the **Dunes Flamandes** (Flemish Dunes) represent a unique ecosystem harbouring hundreds of plant species, including rare orchids. Tides permitting, you can walk or cycle along the wet sand or the GR path from Malo-les-Bains to Lefrinckoucke, Zuydecoote and Bray-Dunes.

## Eating

Restaurants can be found near the Musée Portuaire (along quai de la Citadelle) and facing the beach in Malo-les-Bains (along digue des Alliés and digue de Mer). Five blocks east of the tourist office, Dunkirk's first organic restaurant, **La Demi-Lune** (☎03 28 61 42 77; www.dunkerque-bio.com, in French; 65 bd Ste-Barbe; mains €10-13; ☉lunch only), serves light, healthy lunches at reasonable prices.

## Information

**Tourist office** (☎03 28 66 79 21; www.ot-dunkerque.fr; ☉9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Sun & holidays) Has a free brochure, *Dunkirk Wartime Memories*, on WWI and WWII sites and sells the **Pass Tourisme** (€12) discounts card. Situated in the base of a 58m-high **belfry** (adult €2.90; ☉tours 9 daily Mon-Sat), erected around 1440, with spectacular views and a 50-bell carillon (renovated in 2009) that sounds every quarter-hour.

## Getting There & Away

For details about getting from Dover to Dunkirk's car-ferry port, about 15km west of the town centre at Loon Plage (A16 exit 53), see p973.

**BUS** For details on buses to Calais, see p167.

**TRAIN** Dunkirk's train station is 1km southwest of the tourist office. Rail destinations include Lille (mainly to Gare Lille-Flandres; €13, 32 to 78 minutes, 20 direct daily Monday to Friday, 10 to 13 daily weekends) and Calais (€8, 50 minutes, four to six daily Monday to Friday, two or three on Saturday).

## Cassel

POP 2430

At the summit of French Flanders' highest hill (though at 176m it's hardly Mont Blanc), the fortified, quintessentially Flemish village of Cassel offers panoramic views of the verdant Flanders plain.

Thanks to its elevated position, Cassel served as Maréchal Ferdinand Foch's headquarters at the beginning of WWI. In 1940 it was the site of intensive rearguard resistance by British troops defending Dunkirk during the evacuation.

Its citizens are enormously proud of Reuze Papa and Reuze Maman, the resident giants (p160), who are feted on Easter Monday. A **bagpipe festival** is held in Cassel on a weekend in mid-June.

The main square, fringed by austere brick buildings with steep slate roofs, is where you'll find the **tourist office** (☎03 28 40 52 55; [www.cassel-horizons.com](http://www.cassel-horizons.com); 20 Grand' Place; ☎8.30am-noon & 1.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 2-6pm Sun) and the brand new **Musée Départemental de Flandre** (22 Grand' Place), opened in late 2010, which spotlights Flanders' rich heritage and showcases Flemish art both old and new.

Ten generations ago, wheat flour was milled and linseed oil pressed just as it is today at the wooden **moulin** (windmill; adult/child €3/2.50; ☎2-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 1.30-6.30pm Sun, closed Dec-early Jan, last tour 1hr before closing), perched on the highest point in town to catch the wind. The 45-minute hands-on tour is noisy but interesting. During the 19th century, the skyline of French Flanders was dotted with 2000 such windmills. Nearby, you can peer into Belgium from a **flowery park**; two orientation tables point to cities near and far.

**Le Foch** (☎03 28 42 47 73; [www.hotel-foch.net](http://www.hotel-foch.net), in French; 41 Grand' Place; d €67) has six spacious rooms with antique-style beds, some with views of the square. The elegant **restaurant** (menus €13-25; ☎closed Fri & dinner Sun) serves French and regional cuisine, made with fresh local ingredients, amid carved woodwork and sparkling crystal. Other restaurants and cafés around the Grand' Place include the **Taverne Flamande** (☎03 28 42 42 59; 34 Grand' Place; menus €16-18, Sun menus €26; ☎closed Wed & dinner Tue), whose classic 1933 dining room has red banquettes, red-and-white checked tablecloths and, on cold days, a crackling fire.


Cassel is 57km southeast of Calais. Cassel's train station, 3km down the hill from the centre, has direct services to Dunkirk

(€6, 25 minutes, nine daily Monday to Friday, two or three daily on weekends).

## Baie de Somme

The **Somme Estuary** ([www.baiedesomme.org](http://www.baiedesomme.org), in French, [www.baiedesomme.fr](http://www.baiedesomme.fr)) affords delightfully watery views as the cycle of the tides alternately hides and reveals vast expanses of sand. **Le Crotoy** (population 2340), a modest beach resort on the northern bank, makes a good base for exploring the area. From there, across the estuary, you can see **Pointe du Hourdel**, famed for its colony of sandbank-lounging seals and linked to Le Crotoy by a **bike path** ([www.baiecycletole.com](http://www.baiecycletole.com)); lots of duck-hunting huts; and **St-Valéry-sur-Somme**, which can be reached on foot (with a bit of knee-deep sloggling) at low tide year-round, though only with a guide (the area is notorious for strong currents and galloping tides) – contact **Promenade en Baie** (☎03 22 27 47 36; [www.promenade-en-baie.com](http://www.promenade-en-baie.com), in French; 5 allée des Soupirs, Le Crotoy; ☎9.30am-12.30pm & 2-6pm).

Le Crotoy's **tourist office** (☎03 22 27 05 25; [www.tourisme-crotoy.com](http://www.tourisme-crotoy.com); 1 rue Carnot; ☎9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm or 6pm) can supply you with an *horaire des marées* (tide schedule).

 **Les Tourelles** (☎03 22 27 16 33; [www.lestourelles.com](http://www.lestourelles.com); 2-4 rue Pierre Guerlain; d €79; @☎), a sprawling family-run hotel overlooking the beach, has a bracing Victorian feel. Kids aged four to 14 can stay in a room with 14 bunk beds (€25 per child including breakfast). The attached **restaurant** (menus €23-34) serves French cuisine with Channel Coast touches and offers veggie and locavore options.

## CROSS-DRESSING & AIRBORNE HERRINGS DANIEL ROBINSON

Dunkirk's carnivals, held both before and (mischievously) after the beginning of Lent, originated as a final fling for the town's cod fishermen before they set out for months in the frigid waters off Iceland. The biggest celebration is the *bande* (parade) held on the Sunday before Mardi Gras, when men traditionally dress up as women, costumed citizens of all genders march around town behind fife-and-drum bands, and general merriment reigns. At the climax of the festivities, the mayor and other dignitaries stand on the *hôtel de ville* balcony and pelt the assembled locals with dried salted herrings.

Once, in the Dunkirk suburb of St-Pol-sur-Mer, I caught one of Hizzoner's flying herrings. I was so very pleased with myself that, while I repeatedly deemed the fish unsuitable for lunch, I couldn't quite bring myself to throw it out either. So there it stayed, on the floor of my car, for weeks on end, with predictably unpleasant results...

## PARC ORNITHOLOGIQUE DU MARQUENTERRE

An astonishing 360 species of bird have been sighted at the 2.6-sq-km **Marquenterre Ornithological Park** (☎03 22 25 68 99; [www.parcduarquenterre.com](http://www.parcduarquenterre.com); adult/child €10/8, binoculars €4; ☀10am-7.30pm, last entry 2hr before closing), an important migratory stopover between the UK, Iceland, Scandinavia and Siberia and the warmer climes of West Africa. Three marked **walking circuits** (2km to 6km) take you to marshes, dunes, meadows, freshwater ponds, a brackish lagoon and 14 observation posts. Intro walks begin daily at 10.30am and 2pm. The park is in St-Quentin-en-Tourmont, a circuitous 10km northwest of Le Crottoy.

## Amiens

POP 137,800

One of France's most awe-inspiring Gothic cathedrals is reason enough to spend time in Amiens, the comfy, if reserved, former capital of Picardy, where Jules Verne spent the last two decades of his life. The clean-lined, mostly pedestrianised city centre, rebuilt after the war, has aged remarkably well. Some 25,000 students give the town a youthful feel.

Amiens is an excellent base for visits to the Battle of the Somme Memorials.

## 👁 Sights & Activities

**Place Gambetta**, the city's commercial hub, is three blocks southwest of the cathedral.



### Cathédrale Notre Dame CATHEDRAL

(place Notre Dame; ☀8.30am-6.15pm)

The largest Gothic cathedral in France (it's 145m long) and a Unesco World Heritage Site since 1981, this magnificent structure was begun in 1220 to house the **skull of St John the Baptist** (☀on display approx Apr-Oct), shown – framed in gold and jewels – in the northern outer wall of the ambulatory. Connoisseurs rave about the soaring Gothic arches (42.3m high over the transept), unity of style and immense interior, but for locals, the 17th-century statue known as the **Ange Pleureur** (Crying Angel), in the ambulatory directly behind the over-the-top baroque (18th century) high altar, remains a favourite.

The octagonal, 234m-long **labyrinth** on the black-and-white floor of the nave is

easy to miss as the soaring vaults draw the eye upward. **Plaques** in the south transept arm honour American, Australian, British, Canadian and New Zealand soldiers who perished in WWI.

To get a sense of what you're seeing, it's worth hiring a one-hour **audioguide** (1st/2nd person €4/3), available in six languages, at the tourist office (across the street). Weather permitting, it's possible to climb the **north tower** (☎03 22 92 03 32; ☀afternoon, closed Tue); tickets are sold in the boutique to the left as you approach the west facade.

A free 45-minute **light show** bathes the cathedral's facade in vivid medieval colours nightly from mid-June to mid-September and December to 1 January; the photons start flying at 7pm in winter and sometime between 9.45pm (September) and 10.45pm (June) in summer.

### Hortillonnages

BOAT TOUR

(☎03 22 92 12 18; 54 bd de Beauvillé; adult/child €6/4.70; ☀1.30-4.30pm) Amien's market gardens – some 3 sq km in extent – have supplied the city with vegetables and flowers since the Middle Ages. Today, their peaceful *rieux* (waterways), home to 10 working farms and countless water birds, can be visited on 12-person boats whose raised prow make them look a bit like gondolas. Available later (to 6.30pm) if weather and demand allow.

### Maison de Jules Verne

HOUSE MUSEUM

(Home of Jules Verne; ☎03 22 45 45 75; [www.jules-verne.net](http://www.jules-verne.net); 2 rue Charles Dubois; adult €7, audioguide €2; ☀10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 2-6.30pm Tue, 11am-6.30pm Sat & Sun) Jules Verne (1828-1905) wrote many of his best-known works of brain-tingling – and eerily prescient – science fiction while living in his turreted Amiens home. The models, prints, posters and other items inspired by Verne's fecund imagination afford a fascinating opportunity to check out the future as he envisioned it over a century ago, when going around the world in 80 days sounded utterly fantastic – and before WWI dashed Europeans' belief in a world destined to improve thanks to 'progress'. Signs are in French and English.

### Musée de Picardie

MUSEUM

(☎03 22 97 14 00; [www.amiens.fr/musees](http://www.amiens.fr/musees), in French; 48 rue de la République; adult €5; ☀10am-12.30pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sat, until 9pm Thu, 2-7pm Sun) Housed in a dashing Second Empire



structure (1855–67), the Picardy Museum is surprisingly well endowed with archaeological exhibits, medieval art and Revolution-era ceramics.

### Galerie du Vitrail Claude Barre

STAINED GLASS

(☎03 22 91 81 18; 40 rue Victor Hugo; adult €5; ☎tours 3pm Mon-Sat) Ever wonder how stained glass is designed and put together? You can see firsthand at this workshop, whose artisans fill commissions from churches and private collectors.

### Tour Perret

ARCHITECTURE

(place Alphonse Fiquet) Long the tallest building in Western Europe, the reinforced concrete Perret Tower (110m), facing the train station, was designed by the Belgian architect Auguste Perret (who also planned post-war Le Havre) and completed in 1954. Not open to visitors.

## Sleeping

Amiens' hotels offer excellent value for money but often fill up with businesspeople from Monday to Thursday.

### Grand Hôtel de l'Univers

HOTEL €€

(☎03 22 91 52 51; [www.hotel-univers-amiens.com](http://www.hotel-univers-amiens.com); 2 rue de Noyon; d €75-150; @☎) Offering all the bourgeois comforts, this venerable, Best Western-affiliated hostelry is convenient to both the train station and the city's pedestrianised heart. The 41 rooms, set around a four-storey atrium, are immaculate and very comfortable; some on the 4th floor even come with views of the cathedral.

### Hôtel Le St-Louis

HOTEL €

(☎03 22 91 76 03; [www.le-saintlouis.com](http://www.le-saintlouis.com), in French; 24 rue des Otages; d/q from €60/97; @☎) All the mod cons combined with more than a dash of 19th-century French class. The 24 rooms, some off a deck-like inner courtyard, are spacious and tasteful.

## Amiens

### Top Sights

Cathédrale Notre Dame .....	C2
Maison de Jules Verne .....	C4

### Sights

1 Galerie du Vitrail Claude Barre .....	C2
2 Musée de Picardie .....	A3
3 Tour Perret .....	D3

### Sleeping

4 Grand Hôtel de l'Univers .....	C3
5 Hôtel Central & Anzac .....	D3
6 Hôtel Le St-Louis .....	C4
7 Hôtel Victor Hugo .....	C2

### Eating

8 Covered Market .....	A2
9 Le Bouchon .....	D3
10 Le T'chiot Zinc .....	C3
11 Le Tizgirt .....	C1
12 Marché sur l'Eau .....	C1
13 Match Supermarket .....	D3

### Drinking

14 Café Bissap .....	B1
15 Marott' Street .....	B3

### Entertainment

16 Chés Cabotans d'Amiens .....	B1
17 Ciné St-Leu .....	C1
18 La Lune des Pirates .....	C1

### Hôtel Victor Hugo

**HOTEL €**  
(☎03 22 91 57 91; www.hotel-a-amiens.com; 2 rue de l'Oratoire; d €44-55, q €59-67; ☎) Just a block from the cathedral, this charming, family-run hostelry has two stars and 10 quiet, charming rooms with the pleasing ambience of days gone by. Good value, though the hallways may smell of smoke.

### Hôtel Central & Anzac

**HOTEL €**  
(☎03 22 91 34 08; www.hotelcentralanzac.com, in French; 17 rue Alexandre Fatton; s/d from €49/55; ☎) Founded decades ago by an Australian ex-serviceman, this place has 26 clean, well-maintained rooms. Many have old-time touches but some are a bit on the small side.



### Eating

The **St-Leu Quarter** (quai Bélu) – not quite the 'northern Venice' it's touted to be – is lined with neon-lit riverside restaurants and pubs, many with warm-season terraces. There are more places to eat across the river at place du Don.



### Le Tizgirt

**COUSCOUS €**  
(☎03 22 91 42 55; 60 rue Vanmarcke, on weekends via 7 place du Don; mains €11-22; ☎closed Sun, dinner Sun & lunch Sat) The welcome is as warm as the Algerian Berber-style couscous and *tajines* (stews), which are steamed, boiled, grilled and baked to perfection.

### Le Bouchon

**FRENCH €€**  
(☎03 22 92 14 32; www.lebouchon.fr, in French; 10 rue Alexandre Fatton; lunch menus Mon-Fri €18, other menus €24-42; ☎closed dinner Sun)

The decor is a bit sparse but the traditional French cuisine is good value. The mouth-watering dessert list encompasses the French classics, including *Forêt Noire* (Black Forest chocolate cake; €9).

### Le T'chiot Zinc

**BISTRO €**  
(☎03 22 91 43 79; 18 rue de Noyon; menus €12-26; ☎closed Sun, also closed Mon Jul & Aug) Inviting, bistro-style decor reminiscent of the belle époque provides a fine backdrop for the tasty French and Picard cuisine, including fish dishes and *caghuse* (pork in a cream, wine vinegar and onion sauce). The proper, Picard pronunciation of the name is 'shtyoh-zang'.

### Self-Catering

#### Covered market

**FOOD MARKET €**  
(rue de Metz; ☎9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Thu, 9am-7pm Fri & Sat, 8.30am-12.30pm Sun)

#### Marché sur l'eau

**FOOD MARKET €**  
(place Parmentier; ☎to 12.30pm Sat, to 1pm in summer) Fruit and vegetables grown in the Hortillonnages are sold at this one-time floating market, now held on dry land (except once a year).

#### Match

**SUPERMARKET €**  
(Centre Commercial Amiens 2; ☎8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat)



### Drinking



#### Café Bissap

**CAFÉ-BAR**  
(☎03 22 92 36 41; 50 rue St-Leu; ☎noon-3am Tue-Sat, noon-1am Sun & Mon) An ethnically mixed crowd, including students, sips rum cocktails and West African beers (eg

Guinness Foreign Extra, brewed in Cameroon) amid decor from the Senegalese-born proprietor's native land. The soundtrack is African, Caribbean and Latin American. Super-friendly. Opens at 6pm during school holidays, including July and August.

### Marott' Street

WINE BAR

(☎03 22 91 14 93; 1 rue Marotte; ☼11am-1am, closed Sun) Designed by Gustave Eiffel's architectural firm in 1892, this exquisite ex-insurance office now attracts chic, well-off, thirty-somethings who sip Champagne (€11) while suspended – on clear-glass tiles – over the wine cellar.



## Entertainment

### La Lune des Pirates

CONCERT VENUE

(☎03 22 97 88 01; www.lalune.net, in French; 17 quai Bélu) Hosts cutting-edge concerts a dozen times a month.

### Chés Cabotans d'Amiens

MARIONETTES

(☎03 22 22 30 90; www.ches-cabotans-damiens.com, in French; 31 rue Édouard-David) A theatre whose stars are all traditional Picard marionettes. Great fun even if you don't speak Picard or French.

### Ciné St-Leu

CINEMA

(☎03 22 91 61 23; www.cine-st-leu.com, in French; 33 rue Vanmarcke) An art-house cinema with nondubbed films, some in English.



## Information

Banks can be found around place René Goblet and rue des Trois Cailloux.

**Bibliothèque** (☎03 22 97 10 00; 50 rue de la République; ☼2-7pm Mon, 9.30am-7pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat) Free internet access in a grand public library built in the 1820s.

**Tourist office** (☎03 22 71 60 50; www.amiens-tourisme.com; 40 place Notre Dame; ☼9.30am-6pm or 6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 2-5pm Sun) Can supply details on the Somme memorials (including minibus tours) and cultural events. Sells the **City Pass** (€8), which offers various discounts.



## Getting There & Around

For details on public transport links to Villers-Bretonneux and Vimy Ridge Canadian National Historic Site, see p186 and p187.

### Bicycle

**Vélo Service** (Buscyclette; ☎03 22 72 55 13; http://amiensveloservice.fubicy.org, in French; per hr/day/weekend €1/6/8, tandems per hr/day €2/8; ☼9am-7pm Mon-Sat) A nonprofit organisation that rents bikes from the courtyard of Tour Perret, behind the main entrance.

## Car

There's free parking one or two blocks north of the Victor Hugo and Central & Anzac hotels, along rue Lameth, rue Cardon, rue Jean XXIII and rue de la Barette.

To hire a car to tour the memorials, try **Hertz** (☎03 22 91 26 24; 5 Boulevard d'Alsace-Lorraine).

## Train

Amiens is an important rail hub. Accessed through a dramatic modern entrance, the train station offers direct services to Arras (€11, 50 minutes, six to 12 daily), Boulogne (€18.50, 1½ hours, seven to nine daily), Calais-Ville (€24, 2½ to 3½ hours, six or seven daily), Compiègne (€12.10, 1¼ hours, eight to 12 daily), Laon (€16, 1½ hours, four to nine daily), Lille-Flandres (€19, 1½ hours, six to 12 daily), Paris' Gare du Nord (€19, 1¼ to 1¾ hours, 14 to 30 daily) and Rouen (€18, 1¼ hours, four daily). SNCF buses go to the Haute Picardie TGV station (40 minutes, 15 to 20 daily), 42km east of the city.

## Arras

POP 44,300

Arras (the final *s* is pronounced), former capital of Artois and *préfecture* (capital) of the *département* of Pas-de-Calais, is worth seeing mainly for its harmonious ensemble of Flemish-style arcaded buildings and two subterranean WWI sites.

The city makes a good base for visits to the Battle of the Somme Memorials.



## Sights & Activities

### Grand' Place & Petite Place

ARCHITECTURE

Arras' two ancient market squares, the **Grand' Place** and the almost-adjacent, smaller **Petite Place** (officially known as place des Héros), are surrounded by 17th- and 18th-century Flemish-baroque houses topped by curvaceous 'Dutch' gables. Although the structures vary in decorative detail, their 345 sandstone columns form a common arcade unique in France. The squares, especially handsome at night, are about 600m northwest of the train station.

### Hôtel de Ville

BELFRY, CELLARS

Arras' Flemish-Gothic **city hall** (Petite Place) dates from the 16th century but was completely rebuilt after WWI. Three giants (p160) – Colas, Jacqueline and their son Dédé – make their home in the lobby.

The basement of the Hôtel de Ville is a veritable hub of activity. If you're in the mood for a panoramic view, this is the place



to hop on a lift to the top of the Unesco World Heritage-listed, 75m-high **belfry** (adult €2.70; ☺ same as tourist office). But for a truly unique perspective on Arras head into the slinky **souterrains** (tunnels). Also known as *boves* (cellars), they run under the Petite Place and were turned into British command posts, hospitals and barracks during WWI. Each spring, in a brilliant juxtaposition of underground gloom and horticultural exuberance, plants and flowers turn the tunnels into the lush, creative, life-affirming **Jardin des Boves** (Cellar Gardens; ☺ 20 Mar–20 Jun). **Tours** (adult €5) lasting 45 minutes (in English upon request), focusing on the gardens when they're there, generally begin at about 11am and runs at least twice in the afternoon from Monday to Friday, and every 30 minutes on Saturday and Sunday.



### Wellington Quarry MEMORIAL, MUSEUM

The staging ground for the spring 1917 offensive in which the poet Siegfried Sassoon was wounded, **Carrière Wellington** (☺ Arras tourist office 03 21 51 26 95; www.carriere-wellington.com; rue Delétoile; adult €6.50; ☺ tours begin 10am–12.30pm or 1pm & 2.30–5pm, closed Christmas–mid-Jan) is a 20m-deep network of old chalk quarries expanded during WWI by tunnellers from New Zealand. Hour-long guided tours in French and English combine imaginative audiovisuals, evocative photos and period artefacts. It's easy to tell who wrote which graffiti when: signs painted in black are British and from WWI, those in red are French from WWII, when the site was used as a bomb shelter. Opened to the public in 2008, the quarry is about 1km south of the train station; by car, follow the 'Carrière' signs from the north-east corner of the Grand' Place (bd Faidherbe). Served by buses 1 and 4.



### Sleeping

Place du Maréchal Foch, in front of the train station, has a number of hotels.

### Hôtel de l'Univers

HOTEL €€

(☺ 03 21 71 34 01; www.hotel-univers-arras.com; 3–5 place de la Croix Rouge; d €105–160; ☺ ☺) Ensnconed in a 16th-century former Jesuit monastery, this Best Western-affiliated hostelry is arrayed in a U around a quiet neoclassical courtyard. Classic draperies and bedspreads give each of the 38 rooms a touch of French class – civilised comfort at reasonable prices. Situated four blocks southwest of the Hôtel de Ville and 50m south of No 29 on bustling rue Ernestale;



### ARRAS CITY PASS

Arras' tourist office sells the **City Pass Argent** (adult/student €11.50/5.50), a combo ticket valid for the belfry, the tunnels and Wellington Quarry. The **City Pass Or** (adult/student €19/10) is also valid for the Musée des Beaux-Arts (Fine Arts Museum) and Cité Nature (a science museum focusing on food, health and nature).

by car, take one-way rue Baudimont from the west and follow the orange hotel signs.

### Maison St-Vaast

HOTEL €

(☺ 03 21 21 40 38; http://arras.catholique.fr/page-15065.html, in French; 103 rue d'Amiens; per person €21; ☺ reception 7am–7pm Mon–Fri, closed holidays; ☺) Arras' Catholic diocese welcomes visitors to its dorm facilities, whose 43 rooms (91 beds), for one to four people, are Spartan (the floors are pine planks) but clean and practical. Constructed as a convent in the 1600s and rebuilt after WWI, the atmospheric building has a fine cloister and a 1920s chapel with lovely stained glass and an organ that's frequently played for practice. Disabled access. If you'll be checking in after 7pm or on a weekend or holiday, call or write ahead to arrange for the watchman to let you in.

### Hôtel Moderne

HOTEL €€

(☺ 03 21 23 39 57; www.hotel-moderne-arras.com; 2 place Maréchal Foch; d €80–90; ☺) Facing the train station, with five floors and 50 old-time rooms, each with a decommissioned fireplace. 'Comfort' doubles (€90) offer more space and fine views; some boast French windows and small balconies.

### Ostel Les 3 Luppars

HOTEL €€

(☺ 03 21 60 02 03; www.ostel-les-3luppars.com, in French; 47 Grand' Place; s/d/q from €60/75/90; ☺ ☺) Occupying the Grand' Place's only non-Flemish-style building (it's Gothic and dates from the 1400s), this hotel has a private courtyard and 42 rooms, including 10 with fine views of the square and two fitted out for families. The decor is uninspired but the atmosphere is homey. Has a sauna (per person for a half-hour €5).



### Eating

Places to eat are tucked away under the arches of the Grand' Place and along adjacent rue de la Taillerie, which leads to the

## MCDONALD'S HAS BRANCHES – SOON THE LOUVRE WILL TOO

A local branch of the Louvre is coming to a depressed former coal-mining town near you – at least if you live in French Flanders. That's right, come 2012, when the **Louvre-Lens** ([www.louvre-lens.fr](http://www.louvre-lens.fr)) is set to open in Lens, you'll no longer have to go to Paris to check out the world's most-visited museum.

We may as well be blunt: **Lens** (📍tourist office 03 21 67 66 66; [www.tourisme-lenslievin.fr](http://www.tourisme-lenslievin.fr)), 18km northeast of Arras and 37km south of Lille, is known for absolutely nothing, at least as far as tourism is concerned. But thanks to a high-minded effort to 'democratise' the Louvre by bringing its riches to the people, the town's 37,000 residents are hoping that the Louvre-Lens will do for them what the Guggenheim Museum did for Bilbao. Incidentally, the decision to situate this ultraprestigious project in Lens was apparently helped along by a municipal PR piece that juxtaposed IM Pei's Louvre pyramid with one of Lens' very own pyramidlike slag heaps!

Petite Place. There are more dining options around semicircular place du Maréchal Foch, facing the train station.

### Café Georget

CAFÉ €

(📍03 21 71 13 07; 42 place des Héros, ie Petite Place; plat du jour €8; ☺lunch Mon-Sat) An authentic neighbourhood café. Madame Delforge, who speaks English with a charmingly thick French accent, has been serving hearty, home-style French dishes to people who work in the neighbourhood since 1985. Situated 100m west of the Hôtel de Ville.

### Le Mamounia

NORTH AFRICAN €€

(📍03 21 07 99 99; 9 rue des Balances; mains €12.50-24; ☺closed Mon, lunch Sat & dinner Sun) The elegant, brightly coloured decor mixes the Maghreb with Provence but the couscous and *tajines* are 100% Moroccan.

### La Cave aux Saveurs

FRENCH €

(📍03 21 59 75 24; 36 Grand' Place; lunch menus €13; other menus €18-33; ☺closed Sun) In a vaulted brick cellar that served as a brewery before WWII, this popular new restaurant serves traditional French dishes as well as an innovative, low-fat *bien-être* (well-being) menu (€18). Flemish specialities include *potjevleesch* (€11).

### Self-Catering

#### Open-Air Market

FOOD MARKET €

(place des Héros, Grand' Place & place de la Vacquerie; ☺7am-1pm Wed & Sat) Around the Hôtel de Ville. The Saturday market is really huge.

#### Monoprix

SUPERMARKET €

(30 rue Gambetta & 28 rue Ronville; ☺8.30am-7.50pm Mon-Sat) Four short blocks south of the Petite Place.

### Spar

GROCERY €

(9 rue de la Taillerie; ☺8.30am-1pm & 3.30-8pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-1pm & 5.30-8pm Sun) At the southwestern corner of the Grand' Place.

## i Information

Banks can be found along rue Gambetta and its continuation, rue Ernestale.

**Cybercafé Citoyen** (2 rue du Commandant Dumetz; per hr €2; ☺9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-7pm Sat) Internet access four blocks east of the train station's back entrance.

**Tourist office** (📍03 21 51 26 95; [www.ot-arras.fr](http://www.ot-arras.fr), in French; place des Héros; ☺9am or 10am-noon & 2-6pm or 6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm or 1pm & 2.30-6.30pm Sun & holidays) Inside the Hôtel de Ville.

## i Getting There & Around

### Bicycle

#### Base Nautique de St-Laurent-Blangy

(📍03 21 73 74 93; <http://eauxvivesslb.free.fr> in French; rue Laurent Gers, Saint-Laurent-Blangy; half-/full day €11/17) Rents out bikes 2.5km northeast of the city centre.

### Car

**Avis** (📍03 21 51 69 03; 8 rue Gambetta) Half a block northwest of the train station.

**Europcar** (📍03 21 07 29 54; 5 rue de Douai) Half a block to the right as you exit the train station.

**France Cars** (📍03 21 50 22 22; 31 bd Faidherbe) Two blocks north of the train station.

### Taxi

**Alliance Arras Taxis** (📍03 21 23 69 69; ☺24hr) Can take you to Somme battlefield sites (eg Vimy).

### Train

Arras is linked to the following:

**Amiens** €11, 50 minutes, six to 12 daily

**Calais-Ville** €20, two hours, 13 daily Monday to Friday, seven on Saturday, four on Sunday

**Lens** €3.90, 20 minutes, 13 daily Monday to Friday, seven on Saturday, four on Sunday

**Lille-Flandres** €10, 40 to 70 minutes, nine to 16 daily

**Paris Gare du Nord TGV** €32 or €46, 50 minutes, 11 to 15 daily

## Battle of the Somme Memorials

Almost 750,000 soldiers, airmen and sailors from Great Britain, Australia, Canada, the Indian subcontinent, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the West Indies and other parts of the British Empire died during WWI on the Western Front, two-thirds of them in France. They were buried where they fell, in more than 1000 military cemeteries and 2000 civilian cemeteries that dot the landscape along a wide swathe of territory – ‘Flanders Fields’ – running roughly from Amiens and Cambrai north via Arras and Béthune to Armentières and Ypres (Ieper) in Belgium.

The focal point of each Commonwealth cemetery, now tended by the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission** ([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)), is the Cross of Sacrifice. Many

of the headstones, made of Portland limestone, bear moving personal inscriptions composed by family members. Most cemeteries have a bronze **Cemetery Register** box that contains a visitors book, in which you can record your impressions, and a booklet with biographical details on each of the identified dead (Americans who died fighting with British forces can be spotted by their addresses). Some larger cemeteries also have a bronze plaque with historical information.

American war dead of the world wars were either repatriated (61%) or reburied in large cemeteries near where they fell (39%).

The sites in this section, listed in alphabetical order, are situated in the triangle defined by Lille, Amiens and St-Quentin. Except where noted, they are always open.

Area tourist offices can supply you with some really excellent English-language brochures, including *The Visitor's Guide to the Battlefields* and *Australians in the Somme*. For online information, see [www.somme-battlefields.com](http://www.somme-battlefields.com) and [www.somme14-18.com](http://www.somme14-18.com).

### Tours

Tourist offices (including those in Lille, Amiens, Arras and Péronne) can help book tours of battlefield sites and memorials.

## Battle of the Somme Memorials



# Battle of the Somme

The First Battle of the Somme, a WWI Allied offensive waged in the villages and woodlands northeast of Amiens, was designed to relieve pressure on the beleaguered French troops at Verdun. On 1 July 1916, British, Commonwealth and French troops 'went over the top' in a massive assault along a 34km front. However, German positions proved virtually unbreachable, and on the first day of the battle – the bloodiest day in the history of the British army – an astounding 21,392 Allied troops were killed and another 35,492 were wounded. Most casualties were infantrymen mown down by German machine guns.

By the time the offensive was called off in mid-November, a total of 1.2 million lives had been lost on both sides. The British had advanced 12km, the French 8km. The Battle of the Somme has become a symbol of the meaningless slaughter of war, and its killing fields remain sites of pilgrimage.

## PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

- » **Historial de la Grande Guerre** (p185), a superb introduction to WWI and its context
- » **Vimy Ridge Canadian National Historic Site** (p187), a cratered slice of the Western Front undisturbed since the day the guns fell silent
- » **Thiepval Memorial** (p186), honouring Commonwealth soldiers who rest in unknown graves
- » **Musée Franco-Australien** (p186), an intimate look at Anzac life on the Western Front
- » **Somme American Cemetery** (p185), final resting place for soldiers of a New York regiment

### Clockwise from top left

1. Somme American Cemetery 2. Flags flying over the Australian Corps Memorial Park 3. Headstone of an Australian soldier

DANIEL ROBINSON



1

DANIEL ROBINSON



3





2

DANIEL ROBINSON



Respected tour companies include **Battle-field Experience** (☎03 22 76 29 60; [www.thebattleofthesomme.co.uk](http://www.thebattleofthesomme.co.uk)) and **Western Front Tours** ([www.westernfronttours.com.au](http://www.westernfronttours.com.au); ☉mid-Mar–mid-Nov).

### **i Getting There & Away**

Visiting the Somme memorials is easiest by car but several sites can be reached by train from Amiens and/or Arras; details appear under Villers-Bretonneux and Vimy Ridge Canadian National Historic Site. Cycling on secondary roads is also an option.

### **AUSTRALIAN CORPS MEMORIAL PARK**

This **memorial** (🚗vehicle access 9am–6pm, pedestrians 24hr) stands on the hilltop site of the Battle of Le Hamel (4 July 1918), fought by Australian and American troops under the command of Australian Lieutenant General John Monash. The German air ace Baron Manfred von Richthofen, aka the Red Baron, was shot down a bit northwest of here – Australian ground forces claimed credit but so did a Canadian pilot.

Inaugurated in 2008, the Australian Corps Memorial is 7km northeast of Villers-Bretonneux (and just east of Le Hamel); follow the signs to 'Mémorial Australien'.

### **AYETTE INDIAN & CHINESE CEMETERY**

Towards the end of WWI, tens of thousands of Chinese labourers were recruited by the British government to perform noncombat jobs in Europe, including the gruesome task of recovering and burying Allied war dead. Some of these *travailleurs chinois* (Chinese labourers) died in the Spanish flu epidemic of 1918–19 and are buried in this Commonwealth cemetery beneath grave-stones inscribed in Chinese and English with inscriptions such as 'a good reputation endures forever', 'a noble duty bravely done' and 'faithful unto death'. Nearby are the graves of Indians who served with British forces, marked in Hindi or Arabic, and the tomb of a single German.

The cemetery is 29km northeast of Albert, just off D919 at the southern edge of the village of Alette.

### **BEAUMONT-HAMEL NEWFOUNDLAND MEMORIAL**

Like Vimy, the evocative **Mémorial Terre-Neuvien de Beaumont-Hamel** preserves part of the Western Front in the state it was in at fighting's end. The zigzag trench sys-

tem, which still fills with mud in winter, is clearly visible, as are countless shell craters and the remains of barbed-wire barriers.

On 1 July 1916 the volunteer Royal Newfoundland Regiment stormed entrenched German positions and was nearly wiped out; until recently, a plaque at the entrance noted bluntly that 'strategic and tactical miscalculations led to a great slaughter'. You can survey the battlefield from the bronze **caribou statue**, surrounded by plants native to Newfoundland. Canadian students based at the **Welcome Centre** (☎03 22 76 70 87; [www.vac-acc.gc.ca](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca); ☉9am or 10am–5pm or 6pm), which resembles a Newfoundland fisher's house, give free guided tours (except from mid-December to mid-January).

Baumont-Hamel is 9km north of Albert, mostly along D50.

### **FROMELLES**

'The worst 24 hours in Australia's entire history' – in the words of Ross McMullin, writing for the Australian War Memorial ([www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au)) – took place at Fromelles on 19 and 20 July 1916, when a poorly planned offensive across a 3.6km-wide front, intended to divert German forces from the Battle of the Somme, turned into a disastrous rout: 1917 men of the Australian Imperial Force and 519 British soldiers were killed and another 3146 Australians and 977 British were wounded. It seems likely that one of the soldiers on the victorious German side was a 27-year-old corporal in the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment named Adolf Hitler.

After the battle, the Germans buried many of the Australian and British dead in mass graves behind their lines. Most were reburied after the war, but eight pits containing the remains of 250 men were not found until 2008. To provide them with a dignified final resting place, the hexagonal **Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery** ([www.cwgc.org/fromelles](http://www.cwgc.org/fromelles), [www.fromellesdiscussiongroup.com](http://www.fromellesdiscussiongroup.com)) – the first new Commonwealth cemetery in half a century – was dedicated on 19 July 2010, the 94th anniversary of the catastrophic and pointless assault. At the time of writing, DNA testing had established the identity of 109 Australians.

After the surviving Australians retreated to their pre-battle front lines, hundreds of their comrades-in-arms lay wounded in no-man's land. For three days the survivors



made heroic efforts to rescue them, acts of bravery commemorated by the sculpture *Cobbers* in the **Fromelles Memorial Park**. Inaugurated in 1998, it is situated atop a row of German blockhouses 2km northwest of the new cemetery; to get there, follow the signs to the 'Mémorial Australien'.

Nearby, in what was once no-man's land between the Australian and German front lines, is the **VC Corner Australian Cemetery**. There are no headstones because not a single one of the 410 corpses buried here was identified.

Fromelles is 22km southwest of Lille, mostly along A25 and N41.

### INDIAN MEMORIAL

The evocative **Mémorial Indien** (Neuve-Chapelle Memorial), vaguely Moghul in architecture, records the names of 4700 soldiers of the Indian Army who 'have no known grave'. The units (31st Punjabis, 11th Rajputs, 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles) and the ranks of the fallen – *sowar* (cavalry trooper), *havildar* (sergeant), *naik* (chief), *sepooy* (infantry private), labourer, follower – engraved on the walls evoke the pride, pomp and exploitation on which the British Empire was built. The 15m-high **column**, flanked by two tigers, is topped by a lotus capital, the Imperial Crown and the Star of India.

This seldom-visited – and poorly sign-posted – memorial is 20km southwest of Lille. To get there from La Bassée, head north along D947 for 5km.

### LA GRANDE MINE

Just outside the hamlet of La Boisselle, this enormous crater looks like the site of a meteor impact. Some 100m across and 30m deep, the **Lochnagar Crater Memorial** (as it's officially known) was created on the morning of the first day of the First Battle of the Somme (1 July 1916) by about 25 tonnes of ammonal laid by British sappers in order to create a breach in the German lines – and is a testament to the boundless ingenuity human beings can muster when determined to kill their fellow creatures.

La Grande Mine is 4km northeast of Albert along D929.

### PÉRONNE

The best place to begin a visit to the Somme battlefields – especially if you're interested in WWI's historical and cultural context – is the outstanding **Historial de la Grande**

**Guerre** (Museum of the Great War; ☎03 22 83 14 18; www.historial.org; Château de Péronne; adult/child incl audioguide €7.50/3.80; ☉10am–6pm, closed mid-Dec–mid-Jan). Tucked inside Péronne's massively fortified château, this award-winning museum tells the story of the war chronologically, with equal space given to the German, French and British perspectives on what happened, how and why. A great deal of visually engaging material, including period films and the bone-chilling engravings by Otto Dix, capture the aesthetic sensibilities, enthusiasm, naive patriotism and unimaginable violence of the time. The proud uniforms of various units and armies are shown laid out on the ground, as if on freshly – though bloodlessly – dead soldiers. Not much glory here. The **lake** behind the museum is a fine place for a stroll or picnic.

Excellent English brochures on the battlefields can be picked up at Péronne's **tourist office** (☎03 22 84 42 38; www.haute-somme-tourisme.com; 18 place André Audinot; ☉10am–noon & 2–5pm or 6.30pm, closed Sun), 100m from the museum entrance.

On D1017 at the southern edge of town (towards St-Quentin), **La Chapellette British & Indian Cemeteries** have multifaith, multilingual headstones, with a section for the fallen of units such as the 38th King George's Own Central India Horse.

Péronne (pop 8700) is about 60km east of Amiens, mostly along D1029 or A29.

### SOMME AMERICAN CEMETERY

In late September 1918, just six weeks before the end of WWI, American units – flanked by their British, Canadian and Australian allies – launched an assault on the Germans' heavily fortified Hindenburg Line. One regiment of the 27th Infantry Division, a National Guard unit from New York, suffered 337 dead and 658 wounded on a single day.

Some of the fiercest fighting took place near the village of Bony, on the sloping site now occupied by the 1844 Latin Crosses and Stars of David of the **Somme American Cemetery** (www.abmc.gov; ☉9am–5pm). The names of 333 men whose remains were never recovered are inscribed on the walls of the **Memorial Chapel**, reached through massive bronze doors. The small **Visitors' Building** (turn left at the flagpole) has information on the battle.

The cemetery is 24km northeast of Péronne, mostly along D6, and 18km north

of St-Quentin along D1044. From A26, take exit 9 and follow the signs for 17km.

### SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL MEMORIAL

The **Mémorial Sud-Africain** stands in the middle of shell-pocked **Delville Wood**, which was almost captured by a South African brigade in the third week of July 1916. The avenues through the trees are named after streets in London and Edinburgh. The star-shaped **museum** ([www.delvillewood.com](http://www.delvillewood.com); ☉10am-5.30pm, closed Mon, holidays, Dec & Feb) is a replica of Cape Town's Castle of Good Hope.

The memorial is 13km east-northeast of Albert, mostly along D20.

The **New Zealand National Memorial** is also in this area, 1.5km due north of Longueval.

### THIEPVAL MEMORIAL

Dedicated to 'the Missing of the Somme', this Commonwealth memorial – its distinctive outline visible for many kilometres in all directions – is the region's most visited place of pilgrimage. Situated on the site of a German stronghold that was stormed on 1 July 1916 with unimaginable casualties, it was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and dedicated in 1932. The columns of the arches are inscribed with the names of 73,367 British and South African soldiers whose remains were never recovered or identified. The glass-walled **visitors centre** (☎03 22 74 60 47; admission free; ☉10am-6pm, closed 2 weeks around New Year) is discreetly below ground level.

Thiepval is 7.5km northeast of Albert, partly along D50 and D151.

### THIRTY-SIXTH (ULSTER) DIVISION MEMORIAL

Built on a German frontline position assaulted by the overwhelmingly Protestant 36th (Ulster) Division on 1 July 1916, the **Ulster Tower Memorial** (☎03 22 74 87 14; ☉museum 10am-5pm, to 6pm May-Aug, closed Mon & Dec-Feb) is an exact replica of Helen's Tower at Clanboye, County Down, where the unit did its training. Dedicated in 1921, it has long been a Unionist pilgrimage site; a black obelisk known as the **Orange Memorial to Fallen Brethren** (1993) stands in an enclosure behind the tower. In a sign that historic wounds are finally healing, in 2006 the Irish Republic issued a €0.75 postage stamp showing the 36th Division in ac-

tion on this site, to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme.

Virtually untouched since the war, near-by **Thiepval Wood** can be visited on a guided tour (donation requested) at 11am and/or 3pm; call ahead for dates of scheduled group tours.

The monument is on D73 between Beaumont-Hamel and Thiepval; follow the signs to the 'Mémorial Irlandais'.

### VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

For Aussies, Villers-Bretonneux (pop 4160) is a heart warming place. Billing itself as *L'Australie en Picardie*, the town religiously commemorates **Anzac Day** (25 April; [www.anzac-france.com](http://www.anzac-france.com)) and is home to the **Musée Franco-Australien** (Franco-Australian Museum; ☎03 22 96 80 79; [www.museeausstralien.com](http://www.museeausstralien.com); École Victoria, 9 rue Victoria; adult/student €4/2.50; ☉9.30am-5.30pm, closed Sun), whose displays of highly personal WWI Australianiana include letters and photographs that evoke life on the Western Front. It is housed in a primary school that was built with funds donated by schoolchildren in the Australian state of Victoria. In 1993 the unidentified remains of an Australian soldier were transferred from **Adelaide Cemetery**, on D1029 at the western edge of town, to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

During WWI 313,000 Australians (out of a total population of 4.5 million) volunteered for overseas military service; 46,000 met their deaths on the Western Front (14,000 others perished elsewhere; [www.ww1westernfront.gov.au](http://www.ww1westernfront.gov.au)). The names of 10,982 Australian soldiers whose remains were never found are engraved on the base of the 32m-high **Australian National War Memorial** (D23), dedicated in 1938; two years later its stone walls were scarred by the guns of Hitler's invading armies. The views from the top of the **tower** are breathtaking; when the gardeners aren't present to open it, the keys can be picked up at the Gendarmerie in Villers-Bretonneux, on D1029 towards Amiens. The memorial is about 2km north of Villers-Bretonneux along D23.

Villers-Bretonneux is 17km east of Amiens, mostly along D1029 (formerly N29). The **train station**, well served from Amiens (€3.40, 13 minutes, 11 daily Monday to Friday, four to six daily weekends), is 700m south of the museum (take rue de Melbourne) and a walkable 3km south of the

Australian National War Memorial. A **taxi** (☎03 22 48 49 49) from Villers-Bretonneux to the memorial and back (at the time of your choosing) costs €18 to €20 return.

### VIMY RIDGE CANADIAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Whereas the French, right after the war, attempted to erase all signs of battle and return the Somme region to agriculture and normalcy, the Canadians decided that the most evocative way to remember their fallen was to preserve part of the crater-pocked battlefield exactly the way it looked when the guns fell silent. As a result, the best place to get some sense of the hell known as the Western Front is the chilling, eerie moonscape of Vimy.

Of the 66,655 Canadians who died in WWI, 3598 lost their lives in April 1917 taking 14km-long **Vimy Ridge** (Crête de Vimy). Its highest point – site of a heavily fortified German position – was later chosen as the site of Canada's **WWI memorial**, designed by Walter Seymour Allward and built from 1925 to 1936. The 20 allegorical figures, carved from huge blocks of white Croatian limestone, include a cloaked, downcast female figure representing a young Canada grieving for her fallen. The two striking columns represent Canada and France. The names of 11,285 Canadians who 'died in France but have no known graves', listed alphabetically and within each letter by rank, are inscribed around the base. The peaceful, 1-sq-km park also includes two **Canadian cemeteries** and, at the vehicle entrance to the main memorial, a **monument** to France's Moroccan Division (in French and Arabic).

The rust-coloured **Welcome Centre** (☎03 21 50 68 68; www.vac-acc.gc.ca; ☉9am or 10am-5pm or 6pm) and its modest exhibits are staffed by bilingual Canadian students. Nearby, visitors can see **mine craters**, visit infantry supply **tunnels** (☎03 22 76 70 86; ☉tours depart hourly 9am or 10am-5pm or 6pm, closed mid-Dec–mid-Jan) and peer from reconstructed **trenches** (☉9am or 10am-5pm or 6pm) towards the German front line, a mere 25m away. Herds of sheep – tended by the only two shepherds employed by Canada's federal government – keep the grass trimmed. Because countless bodies still lie buried among the trees and craters, the entire site is treated like a graveyard.

Vimy Ridge is 11km north of Arras (towards Lens), partly along N17. **Trains** link

Arras with the town of Vimy (€2.90, 12 minutes, seven daily Monday to Friday, two on Saturday), 6km east of the memorial. A **taxi** from Arras costs about €23 one-way (€28 on Sunday).

## Compiègne

POP 43,360

The *cité impériale* (imperial city) of Compiègne reached its glittering zenith under Emperor Napoléon III (r 1852-70), whose legacy is alive and well in the château – the star attraction – and its park. A forest clearing near the city was the site of the armistice that ended WWI and the French surrender in 1940.

On 23 May 1430 Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc) – honoured by two statues in the city centre – was captured at Compiègne by the Burgundians, who later sold her to their English allies.

### **Sights**

#### **Château de Compiègne**

PALACE, MUSEUMS

(☎03 44 38 47 00; www.musee-chateau-compiegne.fr, in French; place du Général de Gaulle; adult/under 26yr €6.50/free) Napoléon III's dazzling hunting parties drew aristocrats and wannabes from all around Europe to his 1337-room palace, built around eight courtyards. The sumptuous **Grands Appartements** (Imperial Apartments; ☉10am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.45pm Wed-Mon, last admission 30min before closing), including the empress's bedroom and a ballroom lit by 15 chandeliers, can be visited with an audioguide (available in French, English, German and Japanese).

You have to join a French-language guided tour (included in the ticket price) to see the **Musée du Second Empire**, which illustrates the lives of Napoléon III and his family, and the **Musée de la Voiture**, which features vehicles that pre-date the internal combustion engine as well as early motorcars such as the Jamais Contente, a torpedo-shaped contraption from 1899. The **Musée de l'Impératrice**, which stars Eugénie and includes mementos of her dashing, exiled son, 'killed by the Zulus, in Zululand, Africa' in 1879 – he was serving, with Queen Victoria's express permission, in the British army – was closed for renovations at the time of writing.

Stretching east from the château, the 20-hectare, English-style **Petit Parc** links up with the **Grand Parc** and the **Forêt de**

## WHEN BENNY MET LOUIE

From the American Revolution (when French generals led American patriots, and Benjamin Franklin lobbied Louis XVI) through WWI (when American volunteers carried out humanitarian work long before the doughboys arrived) and WWII (when the Parisians didn't exactly liberate themselves, whatever de Gaulle might have proclaimed), the USA and France have had a prickly but ardent love affair. All this and more is presented through art and artefacts at the **Musée Franco-Américain** (Franco-American Museum; ☎03 23 39 60 16; [www.museefrancoamericain.fr](http://www.museefrancoamericain.fr); ⌚closed for renovations until late 2011), 30km northeast of Compiègne in the early 17th-century **Château de Biérancourt**. The **Jardins du Nouveau Monde** (New World Gardens; ⌚8am-7pm), open while the museum is being renovated, showcase 'exotic' flowers (in bloom from May to September or October), shrubs and trees (eg sequoias) native to the Americas.

**Compiègne**, a forest that surrounds Compiègne on the east and south and is criss-crossed by rectilinear paths. The area is a favourite venue for hiking and cycling (maps available at the tourist office) as well as horse riding. Napoléon I had the 4.5km **Allée des Beaux-Monts** laid out so that Empress Marie-Louise wouldn't miss Vienna's Schönbrunn palace quite so much.

### Clairière de l'Armistice

HISTORIC SITE

(Armistice Clearing; ☎03 44 85 14 18; [www.musee-armistice-14-18.fr](http://www.musee-armistice-14-18.fr); adult €4; ⌚10am-6pm, closed Tue Oct-Mar) The armistice that came into force on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month – the year was 1918 – and finally put an end to WWI was signed 7km northeast of Compiègne (towards Soissons) inside the railway carriage of the Allied supreme commander, Maréchal Ferdinand Foch.

On 22 June 1940, in the same railway car, the French – with Hitler looking on smugly – were forced to sign the armistice that recognised Nazi Germany's domination of France. Taken for exhibition to Berlin, the carriage was destroyed in April 1945 on the Führer's personal orders lest it be used for a third surrender – his own.

In the middle of a thick forest, Clairière de l'Armistice – staffed by volunteers (mainly French army veterans) – commemorates these events with monuments and a museum whose 700 stereoscopic (3-D) photos give you an eerie feeling of being right there in the mud, muck and misery of WWI. The wooden rail wagon now on display is of the same type as the original; the furnishings, hidden away during WWII, were the ones actually used in 1918.

### Mémorial de l'Internement et de la Déportation

NAZI CAMP

(Internment & Deportation Memorial; ☎03 44 96 37 00; <http://memorial.compiegne.fr>, in French; 2bis av des Martyrs de la Liberté; adult incl English audioguide €3; ⌚10am-6pm, closed Tue) The French military base of Royallieu was used as a Nazi transit camp from 1941 to 1944; several of the original buildings have housed a memorial museum since 2008. Of the more than 53,000 men, women and children held here – Resistance fighters, political prisoners, prisoners of war, Jews (kept in a special section) and American civilians arrested after Pearl Harbour – 48,000 were marched through town to the train station for the trip east to concentration and extermination camps, including Auschwitz.

The memorial is 2.5km southwest of the city centre. To get there, take rue de Harlay southwest along the river, turn left (south) onto bd Gambetta, then right onto rue de Paris; or hop aboard bus 5.

### Sleeping

There are several hotels near the train station and just across the River Oise.

### Hôtel de Harlay

HOTEL €€

(☎03 44 23 01 50; [www.hotel-compiegne.net](http://www.hotel-compiegne.net); 3 rue de Harlay; d €74; ⓂⓂⓂ) Facing the river, this family-run establishment has 20 well-kept, comfortable rooms fitted out with colourful wallpaper, old-time tile bathrooms and rich carpeting.

### Eating

Restaurants and cafés are sprinkled around the city centre, including rue Magenta, rue de l'Étoile and narrow, ancient rue des Lombards, which form a triangle two blocks south of the tourist office.

## Bistrot des Arts

(35 cours Guynemer; menus €14-28; ☺ closed Sun & lunch Sat) An old-time bistro with traditional French meat dishes and a selection of fresh fish (consult the blackboard). Midway between the tourist office and the train station, facing the river.

## Monoprix

(37 rue Solférino; ☺ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) Two blocks northwest of the tourist office.

BISTRO ☼☼

SUPERMARKET ☼

## i Information

**Cyber Café l'Evasion** (7 rue Jean Legende; per hr €3.50; ☺ 10am-7pm Tue-Sat, 12.30-7pm Mon) Internet access inside the gallery next to the tourist office.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 03 44 40 01 00; www.compiègne-tourisme.fr, in French; place de l'Hôtel de Ville; ☺ 9.15am-12.15pm & 1.45-6.15pm Mon-Sat) Has English brochures. Situated in a building attached to the Flamboyant Gothic Hôtel de Ville (dating from c 1500), facing a square with lots of tulips and a statue of (who else?) Joan of Arc.

## i Getting There & Away

Compiègne, 65km northeast of Paris, can be easily visited on a day trip from the capital.

**TRAIN** Compiègne is linked by train to Paris' Gare du Nord (€13, 41 to 77 minutes, 13 to 26 daily) and Amiens (€12.10, 1¼ hours, eight to 12 daily). As you walk from the station building out to the tracks, turn right and after about 80m you'll come to the **deportation memorial**, which includes two train carriages of the type used during WWII to ship Royallieu prisoners to concentration camps.

## i Getting Around

The tourist office, in the heart of the city centre, is 600m southwest of the château (served by buses 1 and 2, which are free Monday to Saturday, except holidays) and 1km southeast of the train station.

There's free parking in front of the château (place du Général de Gaulle), southeast of there along av Royale and av de la Résistance, and along the river (cours Guynemer).

## Laon

POP 27,500

The walled, hilltop Ville Haute (Upper City) – an architectural gem – boasts a magnificent Gothic cathedral and commands fantastic views of the surrounding plains. About 100 vertical metres below sits

the Ville Basse (Lower City), completely rebuilt after being flattened in WWII. Laon (the name, as pronounced locally, has one syllable and rhymes with *enfant*) makes a great spot for a romantic getaway.

Laon served as the capital of the Carolingian empire until it was brought to an end in 987 by Hugh Capet, who for some reason preferred ruling from Paris.

## 👁 Sights & Activities

The claw-shaped Ville Haute has no less than 84 listed historic monuments, the densest concentration in France. Laon's narrow streets, alleyways (some less than 1m wide) and courtyards are particularly rewarding territory for keen-eyed wandering.

## Cathédrale Notre Dame

CATHEDRAL

(☺ 9am-8pm) A model for a number of its more famous Gothic sisters – Chartres, Reims and Dijon among them – this medieval jewel was built (1150-1230) in the transitional Gothic style on Romanesque foundations. The 110m-long interior, remarkably well lit, has three levels of columns and arches and a gilded wrought-iron choir screen; some of the stained glass dates from the 12th century. A memorial plaque for Commonwealth WWI dead hangs just inside the west facade. The structure is best appreciated with an **audioguide**, available next door at the tourist office, which is also the place to sign up for a guided tour of the **south tower** (adult €4; ☺ 2.30pm Wed-Sun, daily during school holidays, also at 4pm early July-early Sep).

## TOP CHOICE City Ramparts

WALK

To get a sense of the city and its commanding position, take a walk around the Ville Haute's 7km-long wall, pierced by three fortified gates. For some of the finest panoramic views, head to the 13th-century **Porte d'Ardon** (one of the gates); circular

## CHICAGO'S FIRST

Laon-born Jesuit missionary **Jacques Marquette** (1637-75), a pioneer explorer of the Mississippi River and, in 1674, the first non-Native American to live in what is now Chicago, is commemorated by an haut-relief statue at square du Père Marquette, at the bottom of rue Franklin Roosevelt (below the Ville Haute Poma station).

**Batterie Morlot**, a one-time optical telegraph station; and **rue du Rempart St-Rémi**. Over 80 paths, known as *grimpettes*, take you down the steep forested slopes in every direction.

## Sleeping & Eating

The pedestrianised, northwestern section of Rue Châtelaine (linking the cathedral with place du Général Leclerc) is home to several food shops selling nutritional basics such as bread (at No 54) and chocolate (at No 27).

### **Hôtel Les Chevaliers**

HOTEL €

(☎03 23 27 17 50; hotelchevaliers@aol.com; 3-5 rue Sérurier; d €57; 🏠) Parts of this 13-room hostelry, right around the corner from the Haute Ville's *hôtel de ville*, date from the Middle Ages. Some rooms have ancient stone and brick walls. Renovated in 2010.

### **Hôtel des Arts**

HOTEL €

(☎03 23 79 57 16; www.hoteldesarts02.com, in French; 11 place de la Gare; d/tr/q €52/78/96; 🏠) Facing the train station, this welcoming hotel has 24 simple, bright, cheery rooms. To get there by car, follow the signs to 'Gares'.

## Information

The **Tourist office** (☎03 23 20 28 62; www.tourisme-paysdelaon.com, in French; place de

la Cathédrale, Ville Haute; ☉9.30am-1pm & 2-6.30pm; 📞) can supply you with a free town map and excellent English brochures on Laon and the surrounds. Also offers **audioguides** (€4) for excellent one- to three-hour walking tours of the Ville Haute and the cathedral, guided tours (in French, with guides who speak English) and free internet access. Situated next to the cathedral in a 12th-century hospital decorated with 14th-century frescos.

## Getting There & Around

Laon is only 67km northwest of Reims (in Champagne).

**CAR** The Ville Haute's one-way streets circle round and round – if they don't drive you crazy they'll at least make you dizzy. Parking is available at the eastern end of the Ville Haute, around the Citadelle.

**TRAIN** The train station, in the Ville Basse, is linked to Amiens (€16, 1½ hours, four to nine daily), Paris' Gare du Nord (€21, 1½ hours, 14 daily Monday to Friday, nine on Saturday and Sunday) and Reims (€9, 40 minutes, eight daily Monday to Friday, four Saturday, three Sunday).

The Ville Haute is a steep 20-minute walk from the train station – the stairs begin at the upper end of av Carnot – but it's more fun to take the automated, elevated **Poma funicular railway** (return €1.10; ☉every 4min 7am-8pm Mon-Sat, closed holidays, closed 2 wks late Jul-early Aug), which links the train station with the upper city in 3½ minutes flat.

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